

## **A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Selected Mtn Adverts on Facebook**

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### **Abstract**

*The use of advertisement as a means of communication in promoting a product or service has been a long standing practice in Nigeria. However, the use of multimodality in analyzing MTN adverts has not received adequate attention. This paper, therefore, examines a multimodal analysis of selected MTN adverts with a view to seeing how advertisers communicate their products through different semiotic resources. The paper uses a qualitative method of analysis. Five (5) MTN adverts were selected from Facebook using purposive sampling technique. The paper adopted Kress and van Leeuwen's Social Semiotic theory as its theoretical framework undergirding the paper. Findings showed that MTN utilizes both visual and textual elements in their adverts to effectively communicate with their target audience in Nigeria. The visuals often serve to create an impression and set the tone, while the textual elements provide information and reinforce the message being communicated. The interaction between the visual and textual elements is critical to the effectiveness of the advertisements, with the combination of these elements creating a powerful and persuasive argument. The paper concludes that understanding the import of MTN advertisements require mutual sharing of knowledge by both advertisers and readers.*

**Keywords:** *Advertisement, Social Semiotics, Multimodality, Vector*

### **Introduction**

Advertising has become an integral part of the business world and plays a crucial role in promoting products and services. Advertising is a powerful communication force, highly visible, and one of the most important tools of marketing communications that helps to sell products, services, ideas and images, etc. Many believe that advertising reflects the needs of the times. One may not like it or not but advertisements are everywhere. Advertisements are seen in billboards, newspapers, magazines, on television and internet and are heard on radio. The average consumer is exposed to a very large number of advertisements every day, particularly the urban and semi-urban population. It seems almost impossible to remain totally neutral and not take any notice of modern day advertising. The most visible part of the advertising process is the advertisements

that we see, read, or hear and praise or criticize. Many suitable adjectives are used to describe advertising, depending on how an individual is reaching. Such adjectives are great, dynamic, alluring, fascinating, annoying, boring, intrusive, irritating, offensive, and so on (Omolabi, 2022).

Advertising is an indicator of the growth, betterment and perfection of civilization. It is part of our social, cultural and business environment. It is not at all surprising that advertising is one of the most closely scrutinized of all business institutions. In today's environment, not only are advertisers closely examined by the target audience for whom that advertisements are meant, but by society in general. These advertisers use different means of arresting the attention of the audience. These include colours, pictures, images, vectors, and semiosis which are capable of producing many linguistic meanings. One linguistic tool that helps to decode meanings of these colours, pictures, images, vectors, and semiosis is Multimodal Discourse Analysis ( henceforth, MDA) (van Dijk 2014).

Multimodal discourse analysis is an approach to discourse which focuses on how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just one mode (Ariyo, 2017). Communication nowadays is increasingly becoming multimodal, because of the complex nature of knowledge impartation, and because of the modal affordance of new discourse platforms. This study poses a multimodal discourse analysis in connection to advertising. Communication is a means through which social integration is fostered in the society. One of the powerful modes of visual communication in advertising is the use of billboards in order to project the advertiser's products to a larger audience. The telecommunications industry in Nigeria, with MTN being one of the leading players, heavily relies on advertisement to reach its target audience and promote its services. However, in spite of the available studies in the field of advertisement, there is still limited research that has examined the communication strategies used by MTN in its advertising campaigns in Nigeria. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a multimodal discourse analysis of selected MTN adverts in Nigeria with a view of seeing how both linguistic and non-linguistic codes depict meaning in the advertisements.

## **Review of Literature**

The term multimodal analysis is used both to describe a phenomenon of human communication and to identify a diversified and growing field of research. As a phenomenon of communication, multimodality defines the combination of different semiotic resources, or modes, in texts and communicative events, such as still and moving image, speech, writing, layout, gesture, and/or proxemics (Omolabi & Abdulsalam, 2020). As a field of inquiry, research in multimodality is concerned with developing theories, analytical tools and descriptions that approach the study of representation and communication considering modes as an organizing principle.

Jewitt (2014) opines that (a) all communication is multimodal; (b) analyses focused solely or primarily on language cannot adequately account for meaning; (c) each mode has specific affordances arising from its materiality and from its social histories which shape its resources to fulfill given communicative needs; and (d) modes concur together, each with a specialized role, to meaning-making; hence relations among modes are key to understand every instance of communication. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is an interdisciplinary field that examines the ways in which meaning is created and conveyed through multiple modes of communication, such as language, images, sounds, gestures, and other semiotic resources (Omolabi, 2023).

MDA draws on theories and methods from linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, communication studies, sociology, and other related fields to understand how meaning is constructed through the combination of these different modes. One of the key scholars in MDA is Gunther Kress, who, along with Theo van Leeuwen, developed the theory and methodology of MDA in the 1990s and 2000s. (1996), Kress and van Leeuwen argue that meaning is produced through the relationship between different modes, such as the ways in which images and text interact to create meaning in advertising, news media, and other forms of communication. Roe argues that the body, through gestures, posture, and other forms of embodied communication, is a crucial mode of communication that contributes to the production of meaning. Overall, MDA is a growing field that continues to expand our understanding of how meaning is created and conveyed in a multimodal world.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis is a research approach that studies the ways in which meaning is created and communicated through multiple modes, such as language, images, sounds, gestures, and other semiotic resources. It is a field that has emerged from the intersection of linguistics, semiotics, media studies, and cultural studies, and is concerned with the understanding of how meaning is constructed across different modes and modalities. One of the key scholars in the field of Multimodal Discourse Analysis is Gunther Kress, who is known for his work on the social semiotics of visual and verbal communication. Kress (2010, p.3) defines Multimodal Discourse Analysis as "the analysis of the ways in which meaning is made across the semiotic modes (such as language, image, gesture, music and so on) in particular social practices and contexts". Kress and his collaborator Theo van Leeuwen (1996) have also developed a framework for analyzing multimodal texts that takes into account the ways in which different modes are used to create meaning and the social and cultural practices that shape these uses. Another influential scholar in the field of Multimodal Discourse Analysis is Heather Woods, who has written extensively on the intersection of multimodality and rhetoric. Woods (2015, p.2) defines multimodal discourse analysis as "an approach to understanding the ways in which meaning is created through the use of multiple modes and modalities of communication, including, but not limited to, language, images, sounds, gestures, and the organization of space and time".

Communication in the modern world has assumed a new dimension as the over reliance on verbal expression of the past is being jettisoned for multimodal communication. One major cause of this change is globalisation and the wide access to the digital space, which has impacted greatly on how human beings communicate. The digital space and all the forms of technology in use have undermined the supremacy of verbal language in the conception of literacy, as diverse aspects of visuality have been incorporated into literacy. Another major reason for this reality is the fact that verbal and non-verbal language cannot actually be separated. Communication is thus increasingly becoming multimodal across different contexts as text producers draw on a wide range of semiotic resources for the projection of meaning. Moreover, "in human history, the visual image has never been more dominant than it is now" (Natharius 2004, p. 2).

The popularity of visuality in contemporary human communication has contributed to the growth of scholarship in visual communication. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), the entrenchment of visuality as a subject of scholarly enquiry can be traced to the “late 1980s and 1990s when a number of authors who had been working in linguistics began to realize that meaning is generally communicated not only through language but also through other semiotic modes” (p. 6).

The argument of scholars in visual analysis is that images can be analyzed the way words are analyzed using theories of language use and analysis such as systemic functional linguistics. To avoid the breakdown in the line of communication, readers of the social media products, have the responsibility of seeking meaning beyond just foregrounded resources. Visual literacy is therefore essential. Visual literacy means the endeavor of explicating the varying meanings communicated through visuals. It is the ability to decode, interpret, create, question, challenge and evaluate texts that communicate with visual images as well as, or rather than, words.

Although multimodal texts are also used in diverse contexts such as advertising, service delivery, classroom discourse, and sports among others; they are becoming increasingly popular for discourses of public engagements such as political discourse, protest discourse, and discourse of civic engagements, among many others (see Kulikova & Detinko, 2014; Onanuga & Ademilokun, 2014; Tehseem & Bokhari, 2015). The growth in the use of multimodal resources in the latter contexts is connected with the public’s awareness of the potentiality of multimodal texts to convey clearly important meanings of public relevance. For the present purpose, our focus is on the use of multimodality in the business advertisements context.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopts Kress and Van Leeuwen’s Social Semiotic theory

### **Social Semiotic Theory**

Kress and van Leeuwen's semiotic theory provides a framework for analysing visual communication by examining the way visual signs and symbols are used to create meaning. In the context of the MTN adverts, this involves analysing how the different modes (such as images, music, sound effects, and language) work together to create the overall meaning of the

advertisement, and how the visual signs and symbols used in the advertisements contribute to the creation of meaning.

The analysis also considers the cultural and societal context in which the advertisements are produced and received, examining how the MTN advertises the brand within Nigerian culture and society and how they appeal to different audiences.

The tenets of Kress and van Leeuwen's semiotic resources framework include the following:

**Modes:** The ways in which meaning is made, including visual, written, and spoken language.

**Design elements:** The visual elements used to create meaning, including color, shape, texture, and size.

**Representational conventions:** The cultural and historical meanings attached to particular images and symbols.

**Semantic roles:** The different functions that visual elements can play in constructing meaning, such as actors, experiencers, or goals.

**Modality:** The degree to which elements are concrete or abstract and the degree to which they are close to or distant from the sensory experience of the reader or viewer.

**Ideational meanings:** The meanings that are produced through the representation of actions, events, and objects in the visual image.

**Interpersonal meanings:** The meanings that are produced through the representation of relationships and interactions between people, including power dynamics and emotional states. These tenets can be used to analyze how visual images, design elements, and text work together to produce meaning in a given piece of communication. By understanding the different semiotic resources at play in a text, it is possible to gain insight into the cultural and historical context, the intended message, and the intended audience for that text.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework for a multimodal discourse analysis of selected MTN advertisements in Nigeria using Kress and van Leeuwen's semiotic resources would involve applying their theories of visual communication to the advertisements, and considering the cultural and societal context in which the advertisements are produced and received. This framework would provide a comprehensive analysis of how the different modes and visual signs and symbols used in the advertisements contribute to the overall meaning of the advertisements and how they position the brand within Nigerian culture and society.

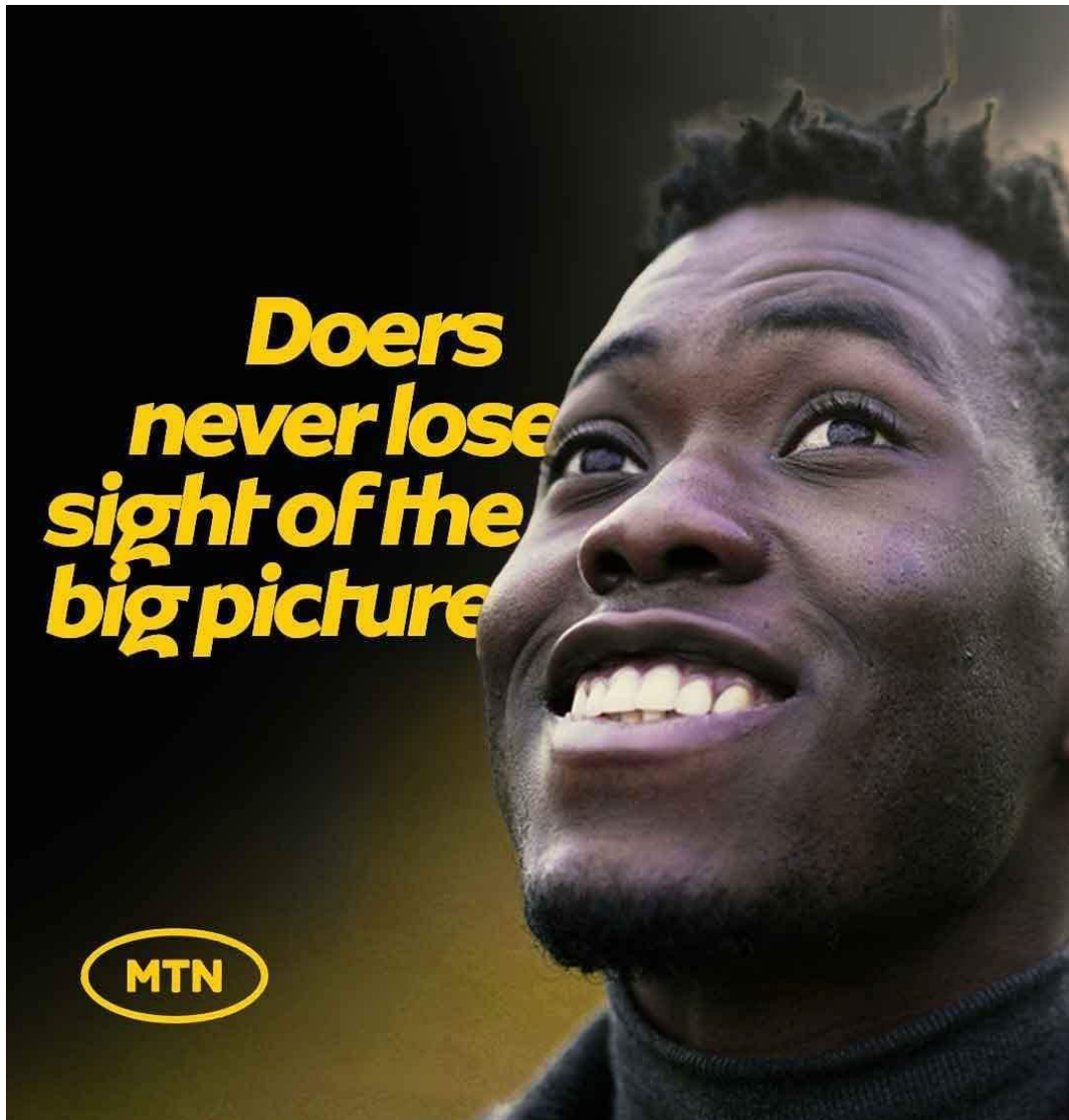
## **Methodology**

This study used a qualitative approach to multimodal discourse analysis of MTN advertisements. A total of fifteen were randomly picked from the MTN facebook page, and subsequently only five (5) were purposively selected from the study; this provided a comprehensive examination of the semiotic resources used by MTN in its advertising campaigns in Nigeria and the ways in which these semiotic resources effectively reach and engage its target audience. The paper adopted Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics as the theoretical framework for the study.

## **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section focuses on the presentation of data and its analysis using Kress and van Leeuwen Social Semiotic theory. This theory is used to explore the full interpretation of meanings in the selected data.

## Datum 1



Kress and van Leeuwen's semiotic theory provides a framework for analyzing visual communication by examining the way visual signs and symbols are used to create meaning. When analyzing the advertisement, we can identify several semiotic resources that contribute to the overall meaning of the image. These are:

**Colour:** The background of the image is black, which is often associated with sophistication, power, and mystery. The yellow statement written on the image represents optimism, happiness, and hope, creating a contrast with the black background. This contrast draws the viewer's attention to the message and the young man's smile, which is the central focus of the image.

**Body language:** The young man's smile and confident stance suggest that he is optimistic and self-assured. This posture reinforces the message of the advertisement, which encourages the viewer to maintain a positive outlook and never lose sight of their goals.

**Text:** The text "Doers never lose sight of the big picture" serves as the main message of the advertisement. It encourages the viewer to remain focused on their long-term goals, even in the face of obstacles or challenges. The text is written in yellow, which reinforces the idea of optimism and positivity.

**Representational convention:** The cultural and historical reality in this advert is portrayed in the race of the man in the advert. The representation of a black man in the adverts shows the location and the social cultural identity of the people which the advert is addressing.

In conclusion, the advertisement uses a combination of colour, body language, and text to create a message of optimism and determination. The young man's confident posture and smiling face, combined with the contrasting black and yellow background and the encouraging text, encourage the viewer to maintain a positive outlook and never give up on their goals.

## Datum 2



**Color:** The use of yellow text against a black background draws attention to the message, creating a stark contrast that makes the text stand out. Yellow is often associated with positivity, hope, and optimism, which could reflect the hope for a better future and the positive actions that people can take to address climate change.

**Image:** The image of the man with a green leaf symbolizes the connection between people and nature, highlighting the idea that humans are part of the natural world and depend on it for their

well-being. The globe on top of the leaf emphasizes the global nature of the issue and the importance of collective action.

**Text:** The text in the advertisement is direct and straightforward, emphasizing the need for action to address climate change and the importance of standing in solidarity with those most vulnerable to its impacts. The use of words such as "race" and "stand in solidarity" suggests a sense of urgency and the need for people to work together to address this issue.

**Representational convention:** The cultural and historical reality in this advert is the celebration of world earth day. The combination of leaf and the globe aligned with the message decoded from the textual part.

Overall, the advertisement uses a combination of colour, image, and text to create a powerful message about the urgent need for action on climate change and the importance of supporting those who are most vulnerable to its impacts.

### Datum 3

**To create a world from nothing. That's art.**

Experience new worlds of art at the Life in my City Art Festival

**Date:** September 17-25, 2022

**Venue:** Alliance Francaise Port Harcourt, Amadi Flats, 20 Herbert Macauley Road, Orogbum, Port Harcourt.

[www.lifeinmycityartsfestival.org](http://www.lifeinmycityartsfestival.org)

Modes: The advert uses visual (image of the painting brush) and linguistic (texts) modes to convey meaning.

Representational Resources: The image of the painting brush represents the idea of creativity and art, while the text provides additional information about the event.

Semiotic Resources: The brush with multiple colours on it represents the idea of diversity and the potential for creating something new and unique. The ash-coloured background and black text colour create a contrast that helps to draw attention to the image and text.

Relationships between Representational and Semiotic Resources: The image of the brush and the texts are related to each other in that they both contribute to the overall meaning of the advert, which is to promote the Life in my City Art Festival as a place to experience new worlds of art.

Ideational Meaning: The overall meaning of the advert is to promote the Life in my City Art Festival as a place to experience the diversity and creativity of the art world. The image of the painting brush and the texts work together to create this meaning.

In conclusion, the MTN advert effectively uses a combination of visual and linguistic modes and semiotic resources to convey the message about the Life in my City Art Festival. The image of the painting brush, the texts, and the use of colour all work together to create a cohesive and impactful advertisement.

## Datum 4

**Tecno Camon 19**  
**Data Bundle**

Enjoy up to  
**9GB**  
**FREE**

**+100%**  
data bonus for  
6 months

**Smarter  
Faster  
Loaded**

The new **Tecno Camon 19** gives you faster access to the internet, HD quality videos, crystal clear voice quality plus **Free 9GB data**

**So, what are we doing today?**

Terms and conditions apply

www.mtn.ng  
Available at select MTN stores and authorized  
dealer outlets

Using Kress and van Leeuwen's semiotic resources framework, the MTN advertisement for the Tecno Camon 19 can be analyzed as follows:

Modes: The advertisement utilizes the visual mode (the two tecno phones placed on a white circled table, the description on the wall, and the background) and the linguistic mode (texts written in bold and additional information).

**Semiotic Resources:** The two tecno phones on the white circled table serve as visual signifiers, representing the product being advertised. The description on the wall lists the features and benefits of the Tecno Camon 19, including data bundle, 9GB of free data, and a 100% data bonus for 6 months. The background, which is a combination of yellow and black, symbolizes innovation, technology, and modernity. The texts written in bold, "Smarter, Faster, Loaded," emphasize the benefits of the product and its advanced features.

**Modality:** The advertisement uses a visual mode that is modal, meaning that the visual elements evoke a sensory experience, while the texts are written in a linguistic mode that is propositional, meaning that they convey information.

**Text-image relations:** The visual elements, including the tecno phones and the description on the wall, along with the texts, work together to create meaning in the advertisement. The visual elements depict the product and its benefits, while the texts provide additional information and emphasize the benefits. The combination of the visual and linguistic modes creates a unified message that highlights the advanced features and benefits of the Tecno Camon 19.

Overall, the MTN advertisement effectively uses semiotic resources to communicate the features and benefits of the Tecno Camon 19, emphasizing its advanced features and encouraging the viewer to purchase the product.

## Datum 5



Modes: The advertisement utilizes the visual mode (the young boy holding a white chalk, the images on the chalkboard) and the linguistic mode (texts written on the chalkboard).

Semiotic Resources: The young boy holding a white chalk serves as a visual signifier, representing the idea of education and learning. The images on the chalkboard, including the love signs, sun, and sketch of a young boy head, are symbols of creativity, optimism, and youthful energy. The texts written on the chalkboard communicate the message of the MTN mPulse Spelling Bee Competition and its benefits.

Modality: The advertisement uses a visual mode that is modal, meaning that the young boy holding the chalk and the images on the chalkboard evoke a sensory experience, while the texts are written in a linguistic mode that is propositional, meaning that they convey information.

Text-image relations: The young boy holding the chalk and the images on the chalkboard, along with the texts, work together to create meaning in the advertisement. The visual elements symbolize education, creativity, and youthful energy, while the texts describe the MTN mPulse Spelling Bee Competition and its benefits. The combination of the visual and linguistic modes creates a unified message that encourages the viewer to join the competition and achieve extraordinary results.

Overall, the MTN advertisement effectively uses semiotic resources to communicate the message of the MTN mPulse Spelling Bee Competition and its benefits, encouraging the viewer to participate and achieve extraordinary results.

### **Discussion of findings**

Findings revealed that the selected MTN adverts utilized visual elements such as images, background colors, and design, as well as verbal elements such as texts, descriptions, and slogans. This is evident in all the selected data as they all share both visual and textual elements. For instance, in datum 1 "*The overall meaning of the advert is to promote the Life in my City Art Festival as a place to experience the diversity and creativity of the art world. The image of the painting brush and the texts work together to create this meaning.*" This means that MTN advert effectively uses a combination of visual and linguistic modes and semiotic resources to convey the message about the Life in my City Art Festival. The image of the painting brush, the texts, and the use of colour all work together to create a cohesive and impactful advertisement."

The visual elements serve to attract the viewer's attention and provide a visual representation of the product being advertised, while the verbal elements provide additional information and emphasize the benefits of the product. The visual and textual elements in the MTN adverts interact to create meaning and convey the message of the advertisement. The visual elements provide a visual representation of the product and its benefits, while the textual elements provide additional information and emphasize the benefits. The combination of these visual and textual elements creates a unified message that is more effective in communicating with the target audience.

MTN utilizes various communication strategies in their advertising campaigns in Nigeria, such as highlighting the benefits of the product, emphasizing advanced features, and encouraging the

viewer to purchase the product. An instance of this is evident in datum 4 *'The visual elements, including the tecno phones and the description on the wall, along with the texts, work together to create meaning in the advertisement. The visual elements depict the product and its benefits, while the texts provide additional information and emphasize the benefits. The combination of the visual and linguistic modes creates a unified message that highlights the advanced features and benefits of the Tecno Camon 19. Overall, the MTN advertisement effectively uses semiotic resources to communicate the features and benefits of the Tecno Camon 19, emphasizing its advanced features and encouraging the viewer to purchase the product.'* Also, in datum 5 *'The young boy holding the chalk and the images on the chalkboard, along with the texts, work together to create meaning in the advertisement. The visual elements symbolize education, creativity, and youthful energy, while the texts describe the MTN mPulse Spelling Bee Competition and its benefits. The combination of the visual and linguistic modes creates a unified message that encourages the viewer to join the competition and achieve extraordinary results. Overall, the MTN advertisement effectively uses semiotic resources to communicate the message of the MTN mPulse Spelling Bee Competition and its benefits, encouraging the viewer to participate and achieve extraordinary results.'*

These strategies are identified by analyzing the visual and verbal elements in the adverts, and the ways in which they interact to create meaning and convey the message of the advertisement.

Finding also revealed that the effectiveness of the communication strategies used in the selected MTN adverts can be determined through various methods such as surveys, focus groups, and sales data. These methods can help to gauge the impact of the advertisement on the target audience and provide insights into the effectiveness of the communication strategies used. Insights into the most effective ways of communicating with the target audience through advertisement can be obtained by analyzing the results of surveys, focus groups, and sales data, as well as by observing the impact of similar advertisements from other companies. This can be seen in datum 2 *'The cultural and historical reality in this advert is the celebration of world earth day. The combination of leaf and the globe aligned with the message decoded from the textual part. Overall, the advertisement uses a combination of colour, image, and text to create a powerful message about the urgent need for action on climate change and the importance of supporting those who are most vulnerable to its impacts'* and datum 1 *'cultural and historical*

*reality in this advert is portrayed in the race of the man in the advert. The representation of a black man in the adverts shows the location and the social cultural identity of the people which the advert is addressing. Therefore, advertisement uses a combination of colour, body language, and text to create a message of optimism and determination. The young man's confident posture and smiling face, combined with the contrasting black and yellow background and the encouraging text, encourage the viewer to maintain a positive outlook and never give up on their goals'*

This analysis can help to identify the most effective communication strategies, and provide insights into how to improve future advertising campaigns. These findings are based on the data analyzed so far and can be used as a starting point for further research and analysis.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has investigated a multimodal analysis of selected MTN adverts on facebook. The paper has therefore discovered that MTN utilizes both visual and textual elements in their adverts in Nigeria. The visuals often serve to create an impression, set the tone, and provide a visual representation of the product or service being advertised. On the other hand, the textual elements are used to provide information, reinforce the message being communicated, and create a persuasive argument.

The interaction between the visual and textual elements in the adverts is critical to their effectiveness. MTN uses the visual elements to grab the audience's attention, while the textual elements provide further information and help to reinforce the message being communicated. The combination of these two elements is what creates a powerful and effective advertisement. The communication strategies used by MTN in their advertising campaigns in Nigeria can be identified through the elements and their interaction in the adverts. For example, the use of color, images, and text in combination with one another can suggest that MTN is using a persuasive approach, while the use of bold text and clear language suggests that they are using an informative approach. By understanding the target audience and their preferences, MTN can determine the most effective ways to communicate with them through advertisements. MTN uses both visual and textual elements in their adverts to effectively communicate with their target audience in Nigeria. The combination of these elements, along with the communication

strategies used, can impact the effectiveness of the advertisements. A deep understanding of the target audience and their preferences can provide insights into the most effective ways of communicating with them through advertisement.

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