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An Analysis of Representational, Interactive and Compositional Meanings in Selected Nigerian Mobile Telecommunication Advertisement Handbills

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Abstract

Advertising is a huge and pervasive industry which plays a significant role in communicating with the target audience about a particular product or displayed services so as to meet certain societal needs. The designer or encoder of consumer advertisements essentially the telecommunication print advertisements employ language and various semiotic resources to project messages to the target audience. This paper examines how various semiotic resources are imbued in selected mobile telecommunication advertisements in Nigeria and how the meanings derived from these modes relate with the target audience. Utilising Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's (1996,2006) Systemic Functional Visual Social Semiotic approach to Multimodal Discourse Analysis as a method of analysis, this paper analyses four randomly selected mobile telecommunication handbill advertisements of two service providers in Nigeria which are MTN and Airtel. The analysis reveals that linguistic and visual modes have interdependent relationship for meaning making. The modes are often manipulated for the purpose of persuasion to appeal to the audience reasoning and sustain their interests. The paper concludes that advertising handbills are not mere pictorial drawings and simple words but they have in them embedded messages which are meant to interact and communicate with the intended audience.

Keywords: Semiotic resources, mobile telecommunication, advertisements.

Introduction

In every human communication, much is said but more is left unsaid. Linguistic and visual interchange of ideas are achieved through discourse tools which have somewhat transformed to accommodate diversity of modes. Multimodality incorporates various or common semiotic standpoints across multiple modes. With the development of multimedia, computer technology and audio-visual platforms,

the earlier dominant position of language in communication is challenged by other semiotic resources. Thus, multimodality has become the order of the day which has necessitated scholars in the information age to dwell more on images and their representations in various forms possible. Visual communication is now adopted by the advertising industry where telecommunication companies, banks, churches, political parties, labour groups, trade unions; the common people and so on communicate their ideologies, ideas and concepts to the public. This is in tandem with Okoro's (1998, p. 12) submission that advertising is any persuasive communication by an identified sponsor, through the media, aimed at selling an idea, product, or service to a target audience. Hence, advertisements are essentially meant to present and exhibit a particular product or service and they usually try to coerce potential population to buy the product or service advertised.

A lot of products are usually advertised through different media. It can be via television, radio as well as various types of prints such as newspapers, billboards, handbills, posters, and so on. Producers usually engage more in advertisement of products that are extremely competitive. A product or service of this kind is the different telephone service provider known as the GSM also referred to as global system for mobile telecommunication which has become an essential commodity in Nigeria.

There has been an expansion of competition among these mobile service companies. These companies in their effort to dominate in the highly competitive and dynamic market undertake varied marketing initiatives. It is therefore a familiar sight to find advertisement of different service providers being displayed on and through different media. It could be on handbills, posters, radio, television, and so on. These media are employed by the service providers in various ways to inform and persuade their customers to use their services.

Basically, handbills are common means of communication. They are handy in size and considered to be a cost effective way to reach out to many people. They are handed out or hung in public places with the expectation that some of them will only get a passing glance before being thrown away. Handbills are employed by network providers in Nigeria in various ways to project their message to the target audience through the use of linguistic resources and attractive visual images to inform customers about a new plan or tariff as well as persuade them to subscribe to such services.

This paper therefore x-rays how various semiotic resources are embedded and manipulated by the image producers in selected mobile telecommunication handbill advertisements in Nigeria and how these meanings relate with the target audience.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis: A Theoretical Synopsis

Discourse analysis has initiated many forms of approach over the years. This is due to the fast growing rate of media communication in the 21st century, thus, making discourse analysis a major area of research. The scope of discourse include: cultural discourse, multimodal discourse, sociological discourse, computer-mediated discourse, conflict discourse, religious discourse, legal discourse, forensic discourse, political discourse and so on. Each of these dimensions has its peculiarities that are socially grounded and conventionally guided.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p.1) submit that modern developments of discourse analysis in general and media analysis in particular have drawn attention to those neglected areas of human communication. That is why O' Halloran (2011, p.1) avers that "multimodal discourse analysis is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, colours, scientific symbolism, gestures, action, music and sound." Paltridge (2012, p.170) gives a detailed explication on multimodal approach to discourse by stating that:

Multimodal analysis considers how texts draw on modes of communication such as pictures, films, images and sounds in combination with words to make meaning. It has examined print genre and web genres such as web images, film and television programmes. It considers how multimodal texts are designed and how semiotic tools such as colour, framing, focus and positioning of elements contribute to the making of meaning in these texts.

Hence, multimodal discourse analysis synonymously referred to as multimodality, multimodal analysis, multimodal semiotics and multimodal studies (O'Halloran, 2011), considers how different modes of communication both visual and linguistic contribute to meaning-making in texts.

Theoretical Framework

Visual Social Semiotics

Social semiotics of visual communication involves the description of semiotic resources or what can be said and done with images and other visual means of communication and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted (Jewitt and Oyama 2001, p.134). The theory of visual social semiotics follows Halliday's theory of metafunctions (1994, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004), which suggests that language fulfils three metafunctions simultaneously, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual. These theoretical notions of metafunctions have been extended to visual social semiotic resources by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006).

The two authorities propose the first universal and broad framework for visual analysis in their work, 'Reading Images, the grammar of visual design'. In correspondence to Hallidayan terminology, they rename ideational as representational, interpersonal as interactive and textual as compositional to present a discussion on the meaning of image in visual communication. Lemke (1998) calls them representational, orientational, and organizational meanings. O'Toole (1994) also labels them as representational, modal and compositional meanings.

Although, O' Toole (1994), Lemke (1998) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996/2006) have tagged the concepts differently, there are no significant differences in their meanings. Kress and van Leeuwen believe that visual social semiotic resources are similar to language. Thus, they posit that "the visual, like all semiotic modes, has to serve several communicational and representational requirements, in order to function as a full system of communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, p.141)". In essence, Kress and van Leeuwen's framework posit that an image not specifically speech or writing performs, simultaneously, these three kinds of meta-semiotic tasks to create meaning. The three meta-semiotic meanings are representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning.

The representational meaning is conveyed by the (abstract or concrete) participants (people, places or things). Two types of representations have been differentiated in the light of the different characteristics of an image. Narrative image and conceptual image.

- a. Narrative image relates participants in terms of doings and happenings of the unfolding actions, events or processes of change, transitory and spatial arrangements. Despite the name, narrative structures or representations are not always telling a story, rather, the important idea is that the objects in the image are acting or interacting with one another. They are recognised by the presence of a vector, an actor and a goal. There are four processes by the kind of vectors and the number and kinds of participants involved: action process, speech and mental process, reactional (transactional and non-transactional) and conversational process.
- b. Conceptual image represents participants in terms of their more generalized, stable or timeless essences. They do not represent them as doing something but as being something or meaning something or belonging to some category, or having certain characteristics or components. They involve three processes; classification process, analytical process and symbolic process.

In the interactive metafunction, images can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame. In this way, they interact with the viewers and suggest the attitude viewers should take towards what is being represented. The meaning of images can be examined from three aspects: contact

(demand or offer), social distance (intimate, social, or impersonal), attitude (involvement, detachment, viewer's power, equality, representation power, etc.) and modality.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p.176) explain that the compositional metafunction has to do with the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate with each other. How they are integrated into a meaningful whole as well as the placement of the elements endows them with specific information values. The compositional meaning resource of images is realised through three interrelated systems: information value (given or new, ideal or real, important or less), salience (achieved through size, colour, tone, focus, perspective, overlap, repetition, etc.) and framing.

Methodology

There are quite a few network providers in Nigeria. The data for the study has been limited to two operators in the Nigerian telecommunication industry which are Airtel and MTN. The selection is informed by a number of reasons: their wide range of subscribers, spread and unbeatable visibility. These mobile telecommunication handbills advertisements are retrieved from individual outlets in different parts of Ilorin metropolis. Two handbills are randomly selected from each of these service providers which make a total sample of four. The selected handbills are analysed via qualitative measures using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual social semiotic approach of representational, interactive and compositional metafunctions.

Data Analysis

Datum 1 MTN: MTN Family & Friends.

New

MTN Family & Friends
Family-friendly rates made even friendlier
No deposits · No access fee · No first minute rate

New Rates		Old Rates	
Call	SMS	Call	SMS
100/sec. To 10 registered numbers	N2/SMS To 10 registered numbers	175/sec. To 10 other contacts	175/sec. To 10 other contacts
200/sec. MTN to MTN calls	N5/SMS MTN to MTN	300/sec. MTN to MTN calls	300/sec. MTN to MTN calls
200/sec. To other networks	N10/SMS To other networks	300/sec. MTN to other networks	300/sec. MTN to other networks
200/sec. For international calls*	N15/SMS For international SMS		

*Call charges to Canada, China, India, UK, America and USA

To migrate text 407 to 131 OR dial *407#
Talk More. Laugh More. Love More.

YouTube Facebook Twitter MTN

In the representational metafunction, the advertisement has a narrative non-transactional structure. The advertisement consists of two represented participants; a man and a woman. They are looking directly out of the picture frame; at agoal

which cannot be ascertained. The represented participants (Nkem Owoh and Patience Ozokwor) have common social attributes, they are celebrities and brand ambassadors to MTN. The caption accompanying the image is about 'MTN's *family and friends*' and the new offer of '10k per second to 10 people'. This means that MTN has a new friendly offer that allows the customer call 10 family and friends with just 10k/s compared to the old rate of 17k/s. The image depicts a family and friend relationship between the represented participants. The smiles on the represented participants face are those of gratitude and happiness of talking to loved ones at a cheaper rate.

Based on the interactive metafunction, the gaze of represented participants are at the viewers to establish an imaginary relation with them. This makes the image a demand image. Their body language/gesture and gaze suggest a challenge to the target audience to emulate them. The way to take up this challenge is to subscribe to the service. The gestural sign of the man's hand pointing at the viewers is also used to form a relation with them. In addition, the represented participants are positioned in a far personal distance and medium close shot. This suggests that viewers ought to identify and emulate these celebrities who do not only subscribe to the service but benefits from it. Also, the represented participants face the viewers frontally and can be viewed from the horizontal point of view. This is used to create a sense of involvement between the represented participants and the viewers. Thus, what the viewers sees is the part of their world, something they can be involved in and can also enjoy.

By the compositional metafunction, the upper part of the advertisement is the ideal, which contains the thematic message, '10k per second to 10 people' and the image of the represented participants, while the bottom which is the real, contains the textual message. This means that the information below serves to elaborate more on the image and the thematic preoccupation of the advertisement. This advertisement also applies the concept of salience as the represented participants are prominent because of their size. This is employed to attract subscribers who are fans of the celebrities to also subscribe to the service. Framing device is also employed to present the image and the text as separate units of information and to distinguish the textual resource of MTN old and new rates. Also, the image is visually separated from the text by colour differentiation.

Datum 2: Airtel: Smart Connect 2.0



In terms of representational metafunction, three represented participants are shown in the advertisement. They are celebrities and brand ambassadors to Airtel Nigeria (Kunle Bamtefa, Mong Kalu and Ayo Mogaji). The advertisement is a product of both action and reactional processes. The men in the background and foreground (Kunle Bamtefa and Mong Kalu) are actors whose actions are transactional. In contrary, the woman in the image (Ayo Mogaji) is a reactor, her eye line forms a vector that is directed to her phone, the phenomena. Their facial expressions narrate a message to the viewers that they are thrilled with Airtel smart connect service that allows new subscribers to enjoy the value of every recharge.

Based on interactive metafunction, the men in the picture are making calls with their gaze directed to an unknown goal while the woman's attention and gaze is fixed on her phone, the three represented participant's attention therefore, are diverted from the viewers. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) term this type of image an offer image in interactive meaning proposition. This offer image is used to inform the viewers of the goodness of getting six times the value of every recharge that Airtel is providing to new subscribers. As a result, the viewers of the image would be enticed to acquire an Airtel sim card so as to derive such advantage. In addition, the represented participants in the background are shown in a close social distance derived and medium long shot. Also, the whole figure of the represented participants in the background is visible while the man in the foreground is shown in the medium shot. These frames and angles are to indicate formality between all the represented participants in relation with the viewers of the Airtel brand. Also, the image can be viewed from the horizontal angle, the represented participants face the viewers frontally. Clearly, viewers are meant to be involved with Airtel to also enjoy six times the value of every recharge. The represented participants in the background are both dressed in traditional Nigerian attires associated with the Hausa and or Yoruba tribe

while the man's attire in the foreground is that of the western style. This is to establish a form of acquaintance between the represented participants and the viewers who vary in terms of cultural disparity, social status and belief system.

In the compositional metafunction, there are two different information value systems within the image which are used to pass across message to the viewers. This is suggested by a clear left and right system. The Airtel logo represents the given. Hence, it is presumed that the viewer is aware of Airtel as a mobile service provider. The textual resource 'load #100 get #600, #200 get #1200, #500 get #3000' and the image of the represented participants constitute the new information value. This new information presents the new offer and also portrays to the audience that previous subscriber, even celebrities are already enjoying the offer as visually portrayed by their gesture and facial expression.

The most salient element is the young man placed in the foreground; he is the most prominent visual resource in the composition because of his size. His prominence is to show the viewers the joy that comes from using this new feature. Also, the advertisement is divided into two equal halves by two colours; red on the left axis and white on the right axis. They are framed in such manner to project them as separate information units.

Datum 3: MTN: MTN HyNet For Home or Office



At the level of representational metafunction, the advertisement has six represented participants; the man in the foreground makes a non- transactive effect on the

viewers. Therefore, the advertisement has a non-transactional structure because of the absence of goal. The man is the actor but the goal is not exposed to the viewers of the image. This salient represented participant appears to be quite happy while holding on to his iPad. He is portrayed as a man who uses MTN HyNet at home with his family and at work with his colleague/s. The other represented participants in the advertisement have a transactive effect on the viewers; their eyelines form a vector which is directed to their gadgets. The represented participants are therefore reactors and their gadgets (laptop/iPad) are the phenomena. The images of the participants are used to depict how fun it is to use MTN HyNet at home and/or in the office.

From the perspective of the interactive metafunction, the gaze of the represented participant in the foreground is at the viewers. The image is considered a demand image in interactive meaning terms. The represented participant's (the man in the foreground) expression is that of happiness and comfort, he demonstrates to the viewers that he is using the MTN HyNet, therefore, he demands that viewers should also try the service. His appearance also suggests that he is a boss or a superior and demands that the viewer too can also be or feel like a boss with MTN HyNet service. The advertisement also has an offer image. The offer image is depicted by the gazes of the other represented participants on their gadgets. This is used to show to the viewers that the offer makes you engrossed with the internet with unlimited downloads. Subsequently, the represented participants are depicted in the advertisement in medium close shot, they can be seen from their waist up except the little boy depicted in medium long shot.

Furthermore, the man in the foreground is placed by the image producer on the horizontal angle from the front. He faces the camera squarely thereby establishing a connection between him and the viewers, thereby initiating an involvement. That is, the viewers can be involved in the service. Other represented participants are depicted from the oblique point of view, they are portrayed to show that the man subscribes to the service at home and in his office.

In the compositional metafunction, therepresented participants are placed as an ideal value of information while the textual information about the Mtn HyNet is positioned on the real. This analysis follows Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) postulation that, the elements placed on the top of the image have an ideal value contrary to the real character and down to earth information of those situated at the bottom. The implication of this assertion in relation to the context of the image is that, the aspiration of many subscribers is to emulate the visual representation of the boss who subscribes to the service by which family and colleagues can benefit. Also, the man in the foreground is the most salient and captivating visual element to indicate that he is the nucleus of information. The iPad is also made prominent to show the

viewers that MTN Hynet service requires the use of a gadget that can connects to the internet.

The ideal position of the image is framed by vertical lines to differentiate the man's house and his office and lend credence to the theme of the advertisement. It also visually illustrates to prospective subscribers that 'MTN HyNet' service can be that demonstrates conveniently used at home with family members and at work. Colour contrast is also employed as a framing device to demarcate the information units of ideal and real.

Datum 4: Airtel: Smart Speedoo

smart**SPEEDOO**



5GB
N2500
3.5GB
N2000
1.5GB
N1000

At the level of the representational metafunction, the represented participant's eye is fixed on his phone, this makes the advertisement transactive. The represented participant is the reactor while the phone is the phenomena. Therefore, the advertisement has a narrative-transactive reaction. The represented participant's expression while on his-phone is that of bewilderment. The image producer uses facial expression to show what the reaction of the viewers will be if they subscribe to the service. Thus, Airtel is indirectly trying to entice the viewer to subscribe to the thematised service.

The interactive metafunction demonstrates that the represented participant's gaze is not directed at the viewers but rather his phone. He appears to be quite surprised with the rate of fast internet service through various social media sites erupting from his phone. Therefore, the image is an offer image that demonstrates the reliability and confidence associated with Airtel internet service. Similarly, the image can be viewed from the medium close shot, that is, the represented participant can be viewed from the waist upward. This is to make the expression of the represented

participant more noticeable. He is also shown from the horizontal point of view derived from the oblique angle to portray that he is able to connect to the world through the various social media access provided by the new offer.

From the perspective of the compositional metafunction, the advertisement has the information value of the given and new. The left section, which contains information on how to subscribe to the service is the given, this implies that the viewers are aware of how to subscribe to Airtel internet service, while the right section, which contains the represented participant, and the cost of the offer is the new, this is to persuade the viewers to look at the happiness depicted by the represented participant and subscribe to the service.

The most salient element in the composition is the given information due to the sharp red colour and prominent size which is meant to attract subscribers who are interested in enjoying fast internet access. Most of the semiotic resources are converged in a single textual composition of the white background. The given information, 'dial... to get started' is framed as a separate multimodal resource by colour contrast.

Modality in the Advertisements

Modality is the last dimension of interactive meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that the term refers to the interpretation of the degrees to which a visual image is considered to be truthful or unauthentic based on its visual coding orientation. Various types of modality markers are deployed in the advertisements.

The first advertisement presents real images and consists of diversified and saturated colours. That is, the advertisement is not an abstract representation of images. However, the setting is not defined as the represented participants are shown in an unrealistic location. Therefore, there is medium modality. In similitude to the first advertisement, the second advertisement does not exhibit a definite setting, it makes use of real images but the setting cannot be ascertained which reduces the modality of the image; the represented participants are only placed on a white background, thereby making the image not completely true to reality.

The third advertisement depicts a well defined setting. The setting is that of a home and an office. This is used to depict the true nature of reality to the sub consciousness of prospective subscribers. The advertisement also contains real images and colour saturation. For instance, it portrays a working class family man which viewers can involve with. It can thus be affirmed that the advertisement has high modality because the various semiotic resources are true to reality. The last advertisement has medium modality. The gradation of brightness and deepness is well differentiated in this datum; this commendable colour differentiation is also reflected in the

dressing of the represented participant. In terms of setting however, the modality of the advertisement is reduced because of the unidentified location which is used to highlight the represented participant as the nucleus of the advertisement.

Findings

It is observed that linguistic and visual modalities are engaged in the advertisements. They provide complementary meanings targeted at informing the audience about the new tariff plans and persuading them to subscribe to the services.

Yuen (2004) postulates that call-and-visit information is usually manifested in print advertisement. According to her, they are less prominent and they contain contact information as to where, how and when the products and services are available to consumers. This is true of only the MTN advertisements (datum one and three) where the call-and-visit information occupies the bottom part of the handbills and contains social network logos of Facebook, Twitter, Google search, Youtube which are provided to inform potential subscribers about additional information via the available social networks.

In addition, Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) explain that colour is a very important semiotic resource for visual communication and meaning making in social and cultural context. The analysis of the data showed that colour enhances the semantic quality of the advertisements. The colours, yellow and blue are applied by MTN while Airtel generously deploys red and white colours. These primary colours are exploited as a framing device to make a semiotic resource salient and to anchor the service operators' identity in the minds of the target audience. It is also discovered that mobile telecommunication advertisements rarely have realistic settings. The represented participants are preponderantly placed on plain backgrounds which reduces the visual modality of the advertisements. The Airtel handbills effectively display this feature.

Abdurrahman, Owusu, Soladoye & Khalimutu (2018, p.416) state that "promoting brands via celebrities is trending among organizations in Nigeria especially those in the telecommunication sector". The analyses of the selected mobile telecommunication advertisements indicate that celebrities are portrayed as demand or offer images. Their fame and social status are utilised by the advertisers to entice customers to subscribe to their services. This is due to the fact that, most people especially fans, tend to emulate their lifestyles. In addition, the represented participants are mostly portrayed frontally from the horizontal point of view. The image producers employ this frame size to maintain a close bond with their target audience.

Conclusion

Visual and linguistic modes or resources remain central as marketing devices for advertisements. Advertising handbills are not mere pictorial drawings and simple words they but have in them embedded messages which are meant to interact and communicate with the intended audience. This has been made evident by multimodal discourse analysis in accordance with theoretical framework adopted for this study to stress that meaning making is a crucial factor in human existence as such it is important for advertisers, consumers and potential consumers to encode and decode these semiotic modes insistently for effective communication to be achieved.

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