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## Multimodal Meaning-Making in Social Media Advertising: A Study of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Resource Integration in Kenyan X Advertisements

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the interplay between linguistic and non-linguistic resources in social media advertisements, specifically focusing on X ads from Kenyan companies. Grounded in the framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar theory, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to analyse how text, imagery, colour, layout, and other visual elements co-construct meaning in digital advertisements. Using a purposive sample of 12 X ads from major Kenyan banks and fast-food brands, this research identifies how multimodal strategies are employed to enhance brand identity, cultural resonance, and audience engagement. The findings demonstrate that advertisers use specific design elements such as foreground, strategic typography, brand colour consistency, local dialects, and visual symbolism to create cohesive and persuasive messages. This study contributes to discourse analysis, visual communication, and digital marketing by illuminating the dynamic interactions of semiotic modes in meaning-making processes online.

**Key words:** Discourse analysis, linguistic resources, multimodality, non-linguistic resources, visual grammar.



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## INTRODUCTION

Advertising in the digital era has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from traditional print and broadcast media to highly interactive online platforms. In Kenya, this evolution has created both opportunities and challenges for advertisers seeking to reach increasingly digital and multilingual audiences. The central problem addressed in this study is how meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic and non-linguistic resources in Kenyan social media advertisements, particularly on X. Despite the growing use of X by Kenyan companies to promote brands and engage consumers, the complex interplay between textual and visual elements in these advertisements remains underexplored. Traditional discourse analysis has often privileged language, thereby overlooking visual and symbolic resources that are equally integral to meaning-making. This gap is especially critical in contexts like Kenya, where multilingualism, cultural diversity, and uneven levels of digital literacy shape how advertising messages are interpreted.

Key concepts in this study include multimodality, which refers to the use of multiple modes such as language, image, colour, and layout to create meaning, and discourse, which encompasses communicative practices through which meaning is socially constructed. Together, these ideas form the basis of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)—a framework for understanding how diverse semiotic modes combine to produce coherent messages in visual and textual communication.

Scholars argue that advertising is not solely a linguistic activity but rather a multimodal process that integrates various communicative resources. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Visual Grammar* underscores that meaning in multimodal texts is constructed through the interplay of representational, interactive, and compositional elements. Similarly, Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics views language as a meaning-making resource embedded in a social context, aligning well with multimodal analysis. Earlier advertising research supports this perspective: Leiss et al. (1986) and Dyer (1982) describe advertisements as systems of culturally embedded signs, while Cook (2001) and

Goddard (2002) highlight the interdependence of visual and verbal cues in persuasive communication.

Adams et al. (2014) observe in their study of Kenyan telecom advertisements that the simultaneous use of text, images, and design features can create interpretive challenges, confirming that advertisements "employ more than one mode of communication," which audiences must decode holistically. Recent studies in Kenya further demonstrate the importance of this multimodal approach. Midigo et al. (2024), examining television advertisements, found that images, sound, and text each contributed distinct interpretive roles, with cultural and religious norms shaping audience perceptions of visual elements. Ingolo and Ong'onda (2024) analysed COVID-19 public health posters and demonstrated that the use of bold visuals, culturally relevant icons, and clear imperative messages like "Stay Safe" effectively enhanced message retention and improved clarity. These studies highlight that multimodal texts in Kenya are not merely read; they are actively interpreted through the lens of local cultural frameworks. While these studies affirm the value of multimodal analysis in Kenyan advertising, they focus on traditional and public communication contexts rather than the interactive digital environment. The present study extends their insights by investigating how similar multimodal strategies operate on X, where meaning is shaped not only by design but also by digital interactivity and audience engagement.

At the same time, market analyses highlight that Kenyan advertising in 2025 is increasingly mobile-first, short-form, and visually driven, relying heavily on influencer engagement and culturally localised content to maximise reach (ShiftPulse Insights, 2025). Broader continental reviews of African digital advertising trends also emphasise localisation, noting that campaigns are more effective when they incorporate indigenous languages, cultural narratives, and local creative practices (The Evolution of Digital Advertising in Africa, 2024).

Kenyan companies have increasingly adopted social media platforms to reach and engage audiences, particularly younger demographics. As a platform with high uptake, X provides a fast, interactive space

for brand-consumer communication. However, a key problem lies in how meaning is constructed in these advertisements, especially in a context where advertisers combine text, images, logos, and colours to craft persuasive messages. Traditional discourse analysis often focuses solely on language, underestimating the contributions of other semiotic modes to the overall message.

As digital advertising continues to grow, particularly on platforms like X, where the format is highly visual and compressed, there is a growing need to understand how multiple communicative resources work together to achieve advertising goals. This is especially relevant in Kenya, where the interpretation of messages is influenced by factors such as culture, language variation, and digital literacy. Yet, few studies have focused on how linguistic and non-linguistic resources interact in Kenyan social media advertising. This paper, therefore, examined how X advertisements in Kenya construct meaning through the integration of linguistic and visual resources. Drawing on Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Kress and van Leeuwen's *Visual Grammar*, the study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyse a purposive sample of X ads from Kenyan banks and fast-food brands. The discussion highlights multimodal strategies that enhance persuasion, brand identity, and cultural resonance, concluding with implications for digital communication, advertising practice, and discourse analysis.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Multimodality and Advertising Discourse

Advertising has long been recognised as an inherently multimodal discourse, combining language with visual, typographic, and colour elements to construct persuasive meanings. In multimodal texts like ads, colour, font, layout, images, and icons all contribute to meaning-making, showing that 'words are not the only means by which we communicate. Semiotically, each mode in an advertisement functions as a choice system: for instance, bright colours or high-contrast layouts may command attention, while slogan text carries explicit propositions. Foundations in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978) stress that any text – whether spoken, written or visual – is organised by

ideational (content), interpersonal (social) and textual (coherence) metafunctions. Kress and van Leeuwen's *Visual Grammar* extends Halliday's framework to images: the ideational metafunction of language corresponds to the *representational* function of visuals, which manifests through *narrative* (action) and *conceptual* (classification) imagery. Ads also exploit the interactive (relationship with viewer) and compositional (layout and framing) meanings of images, mirroring Halliday's interpersonal and textual metafunctions. Together, these theories highlight that ads create layered meaning: for example, a celebrity's gaze in an image (interpersonal) or the positional salience of a product (compositional) work in tandem with text to persuade viewers.

Studies on multimodality suggest that communication is no longer text-dependent but shaped by the integration of multiple semiotic modes. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) argue that visual elements such as image composition, gaze, and colour function similarly to grammar in language. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) offers tools for analysing how meaning is constructed through visual and verbal elements in context.

Early discourse analysts like Cook (1992) and Goddard (2002) observed that advertising language is deliberately crafted to influence audiences. In fact, the very term *advertisement* derives from Latin *advertere* ("to turn toward"), signifying its purpose to attract attention. Practically, the goal of an ad is to "raise people's attention toward an advertised product" and ultimately to persuade them to purchase it. As Dyer (2008) notes, most commercial ads overtly seek to "convince viewers to buy" by appealing to aspirations, values or needs. Modern multimodal theory emphasises that this persuasion is achieved through the orchestrated interplay of modes. Visual semioticians have shown, for instance, that print ads often encode sexuality or status via images and colour (a conceptual message), while the slogan (textual message) provides a persuasive argument or call-to-action (Bateman, 2014). In sum, the advertising discourse combines grammatical (textual) and visual resources in a semiosis that is more than the sum of its parts.

Cook (2001) views advertisements as complex discourses combining text and context, while Goddard (2002) emphasises the role of visual design and typography. In the Kenyan context, studies by Adams *et al.* (2014) and Kodak (2015) have shown the application of multimodal techniques in newspaper and television advertisements, respectively, but fewer have focused on social media advertising. A recent study by *Global Social Sciences Review*, Nasir and Ullah (2024), highlights how multimodal discourse analysis can be applied to advertisements, showing how signs, symbols, and visual-typographic features work together to construct persuasive messages.

### Social Media as Multimodal Communication Spaces

Social media platforms are, by design, multimodal environments where text, images, video, emoji, hashtags, and layout interact to create meaning. X (recently rebranded as X) exemplifies this: a single “tweet” can include written language, hyperlinks, tagged handles, images or videos, and viral hashtags. These affordances mean that brands advertising on X must orchestrate multiple codes. For example, an X “Card” allows an advertiser to attach a photo or short video to a tweet, combining visual and verbal modes in one unit. Similarly, hashtags (#) function as meta-textual signs that group content thematically, while emojis can add emotional or cultural nuance to a message. Jewitt and other multimodal scholars argue that digital platforms require us to analyse communication as an *ensemble* of modes: an image’s colour and composition, font style and size, and the verbal slogan all coalesce to encode brand meaning.

In Kenya, X’s user base is modest but engaged. As of early 2023, Data Reportal reports about 1.90 million X users in Kenya (roughly 3.5% of the population), compared to ~14 million Facebook users (25.1% of the population). This indicates X’s reach is smaller than other platforms, but Kenyan X users tend to be highly active, mobile-first, and trend-aware. Industry sources note that most Kenyan X access is via smartphones, and the platform serves as “a hub for discussions, trending topics, and real-time conversations”. In practice, advertisers on X exploit these engagement patterns. Common X ad formats in Kenya include *Promoted Tweets* (standard tweets

paid to reach more users), *Promoted Trends* (sponsored hashtags to generate buzz), and *Follower Campaigns*. Crucially, X Cards enable “multimedia-rich” content: businesses can embed images, videos or website previews into a tweet. Such tweets thereby function as true multimodal messages, where the image’s visual grammar and the text’s wording work together to catch the eye and convey brand identity.

The academic literature on social media highlights that meaning on such platforms is co-constructed through all available semiotic resources. For instance, social semiotic approaches would examine how the colour palette or filters in an ad image resonate with cultural codes, or how the sequential layout of a tweet thread builds a narrative. Although formal research on X advertising is still emerging, studies (e.g. on native ads) note that social-media ads often employ symbolic visuals and text rhetoric jointly to persuade. In Kenya’s context, digital marketing experts stress that X ads must be optimised for mobile viewing and use concise, compelling visuals alongside sharp copy. The interplay of modes on X reflects the broader principle: linguistic text and non-verbal features (images, colour, layout) together shape the ad’s message.

Multimodal studies of advertising in Kenya are beginning to appear, although few have focused specifically on social media ads. Adams *et al.* (2014) applied Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) Multimodal Discourse Analysis to print ads for Safaricom (a leading Kenyan telecom). They found that consumer ads “employ more than one mode of communication” and examined how written language and visual semiotics co-occur to influence audience interpretation. This work illustrates that even in newspaper ads, Kenyan advertisers rely on the interaction of text and imagery to communicate features and benefits. Similarly, Midigo *et al.* (2024) analysed a television ad for “Raha Premium” maize meal and reported that each semiotic mode (visual signifiers, speech, text) played a unique role in meaning. Viewers’ interpretations were shaped not only by the product image and verbal slogans but also by cultural factors like political or religious associations with certain symbols. In another Kenyan

study using multimedia discourse methods, Midigo et al. (2024) examined a Downy Lavender laundry detergent TV ad featuring a celebrity endorser. He showed that verbal and visual cues (celebrity image, setting, voiceover language) highlighted themes of luxury, freshness and trustworthiness, thereby encoding ideologies about gender and social status for the audience.

Beyond commercial advertising, multimodal analyses have also appeared in public messaging in Kenya. Ingolo and Ong'onda (2024) applied multimodal discourse analysis to COVID-19 health posters. They found that Kenyan posters typically used bold colours and culturally resonant icons (e.g. masks, handwashing symbols) to capture attention, paired with imperative text ("Stay Safe") to persuade the public. Although these posters are government campaigns, the findings are instructive for advertisers: they demonstrate how visual design (colour, iconography, layout) and succinct language function together to communicate and reinforce key messages.

In summary, Kenyan scholars have begun mapping the multimodal landscape of advertising communication – from print and TV ads to public health campaigns. These studies confirm that local ads, like international examples, leverage both linguistic and non-linguistic modes in tandem. However, there remains a gap: to date, no study has closely examined X/X advertisements in Kenya. Given the platform's growing ad reach and distinct multimodal features (hashtags, cards, brevity), such research is timely. Understanding how Kenyan X ads use text, visuals, colour and layout to create persuasive meaning will build on this emerging literature and address an important dimension of multimodal advertising discourse in the digital age. This study contributes to the existing literature by extending multimodal discourse analysis to the under-researched domain of Kenyan X ads, with a specific focus on how different semiotic resources interact to construct meaning.

### Theoretical Framework

The analysis is based on the Visual Grammar framework by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), which itself draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional

Linguistics. This model identifies three core metafunctions of communication: Representational Meaning, Interactive Meaning and Compositional Meaning.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar offers an analogous three-part metafunctional framework for the visual mode. They propose that images and other non-linguistic semiotic resources carry a representational meaning (roughly corresponding to ideational content), an interactive meaning (corresponding to interpersonal engagement), and a compositional meaning (corresponding to textual organisation). Representational meaning pertains to what is depicted in the image – for example, are objects and people shown engaging in action (a *narrative process*) or being classified or symbolised (a *conceptual process*). Interactive meaning relates to the relationship between image and viewer: aspects such as eye gaze or pointing (visual contact), depicted distance (social distance), angle and point-of-view (image attitude), and the degree of realism or stylisation (image modality) all signal how the ad reaches out to the audience. Finally, compositional meaning concerns the layout and design choices – how elements are arranged on the page or screen to create a unified message. This includes information value (e.g. left/right or top/bottom placement of elements to signal "given" vs "new" information), salience (size, colour contrast or focalisation that makes some elements stand out), and framing (lines or colour blocks that group or separate elements). In practice, the image, colour scheme, and layout of an X advertisement will be interpreted through these categories: what do the visuals *represent*, how do they *address* the viewer, and how are they *composed* to guide the reader's attention.

This framework allows us to understand how each semiotic mode contributes to meaning, and how they interact in multimodal texts like X advertisements. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar provides a rich, systematic basis for unpacking how both linguistic and non-linguistic resources jointly make meaning in Kenyan X advertisements.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) design to interpret how linguistic and visual resources jointly construct meaning in X advertisements. MDA views communication as inherently multimodal, examining how text, images, layout and colour work together to create messages. In this approach, each advertisement is treated as a "multimodal text" whose meaning can be analysed through Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Kress & van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (VG) framework. Halliday's three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) correspond respectively to Kress & van Leeuwen's representational, interactive, and compositional meanings in the image mode.

This integration allows the research to trace how experiential content (what is happening and who is involved), interpersonal relations (tone, speech act), and textual organisation are realised across both the verbal and visual elements of each X advert.

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on 12 purposively sampled X advertisements from major Kenyan brands: KCB, Equity, Co-op Bank, NCBA, and KFC. The ads were selected based on their richness in multimodal features and their diversity in message framing. The data were collected by retrieving official advertisements posted on the verified X accounts of these brands between January and December 2024. Each selected advertisement was downloaded in its original form, ensuring both textual and visual elements were intact for analysis. Each selected tweet was captured using X's inbuilt screenshot and download functions to preserve both visual and textual elements in their original form. Each ad was analysed using the MDA framework with particular attention to the interaction between text and visuals, foregrounding, and use of brand logos.

The choice of banks and KFC was deliberate to capture diversity in advertising strategies across sectors with a strong digital presence in Kenya. Banks such as KCB, Equity, Co-op Bank, and NCBA were selected because the financial sector is among the most active in online marketing, often using social media to promote trust, innovation, and customer engagement. KFC, on the other hand,

represents the fast-food industry, which relies heavily on visual appeal, lifestyle imagery, and persuasive multimodal techniques.

All data used in this study were publicly available advertisements obtained from verified brand accounts on X. As such, the research did not involve any direct interaction with human participants, nor did it collect any personal or private information. Ethical integrity was maintained by ensuring accurate representation of the brands' content and avoiding any modification of the original materials. The study adhered to academic ethical standards for the use of publicly accessible online data and proper acknowledgement of all sources.

## Sampling and Data Collection

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select the advertisements. Purposive sampling (also called judgmental sampling) involves deliberately choosing cases that are expected to be most informative. In line with this, the researcher manually identified tweets that met specific relevance and richness criteria. The dataset comprised tweets from the official accounts of Kenyan banks and the KFC fast food franchise. The ads were selected according to visual richness (The ad contains prominent visual elements, such as colourful images, photos, or graphics). Ads with only text or minimal imagery were excluded. The other aspect considered was Kenyan market relevance (The advertisement is produced by or for a Kenyan brand, or explicitly targets Kenyan consumers (through local language, cultural symbols, Kenyan context, etc.).

The methodological approach follows established MDA practices and qualitative sampling principles. The analysis drew on Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) for visual grammar concepts and Halliday (1994/2004) for textual grammar concepts.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Interplay of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Resources in Kenyan X Ads

#### Foregrounding Text in Advertisements

Foregrounding can happen both visually and linguistically. Linguistically, foregrounding is achieved through various ways, and it is done in a way that part of the text in a sentence is given more emphasis. Foregrounding in a sentence involves

putting emphasis on specific elements to make them stand out and, in doing so, draw more attention to them. In advertising, foregrounding is done to create attention to the most important part of the sentence.

Foregrounding in the X advertisements serves as a key compositional strategy for directing viewer

attention to the core message. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), salience determines which elements attract the viewer's gaze through contrasts in colour, size, or placement. In Ad 1, the word DELIVERY appears in bold red, immediately drawing attention and conveying urgency.



Figure 1: AD 1: KFC DELIVERY

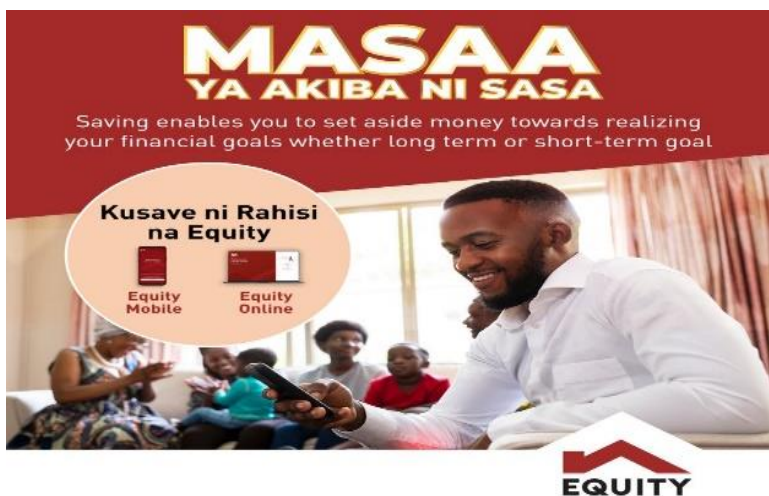


Figure 2: AD 6: EQUITY SAVING

The colour red, culturally associated with energy and alertness in Kenyan advertising contexts, enhances the representational meaning by emphasising the service's immediacy. Similarly, Ad 6's Swahili headline employs local linguistic identity as a semiotic resource that enacts the interactive meaning—creating familiarity and inclusion by addressing the audience in a shared cultural code

(Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 117). Ad 6 uses language too as a way of foregrounding, although not the local dialect, but rather Swahili, which means the target audience is all Kenyans. "MASAA YA AKIBA NI SASA", which in English means "TIME TO SAVE IS NOW", has been put at the top of the advert with capitalisation, which makes it easier for the target audience to see and understand the advert.

The foregrounding has been done in a way that the following text is written in small letters and in all English.

In several bank adverts, such as Ads 3, 5, and 8, the use of large, capitalised text in corporate blues and greens reflects compositional balance and authority. These colours realise the interpersonal metafunction (Halliday, 1994; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), visually constructing a relationship of trust between the institution and its clients. Ad 5 and Ad 3 have combined both capitalisation and colour as a way of foregrounding the text. The words "USITENSE" in

these ads have been used to foreground the text. In both Ads, foregrounding has been achieved through the use of capitalising the final parts of the text, which looks more like an answer to a question in the first part of the text. This also brings more attention to the foregrounded text, which looks more like an answer to a problem posed by the advertiser. Ad 8 has used the colour blue to highlight the product being advertised (NCBA TILL). In Multimodal discourse analysis, using text in brand colour involves integrating text with the brand's colour, which creates cohesion and makes the advert visually appealing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).



Figure 3: AD 3: KCB MPESA



Figure 4: AD 5: KCB MPESA2



Figure 5: AD 8: NCBA BUSINESS

The textual framing of key words like “secure,” “grow,” and “trust” visually foregrounds brand values, while the neutral background supports clarity and legibility. Ad 7, for instance, integrates Sheng expressions alongside English phrases, blending

linguistic modes to appeal to youth audiences. This juxtaposition demonstrates multimodality’s power to evoke both cultural belonging and aspirational tone, fulfilling the interactive dimension of visual communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).



Figure 6: AD 7: KCB MOBILE APP

Ad 4 has used colour and the use of local dialect as a way of putting emphasis and attention on the most important part of the text in the advert. The advert is advertising KFC's new branch, and two parts have been emphasised through colour and language used. The words "NIYUKITE MASAKU" have a different attention to the reader, while "MASAKU" is put in

black colour to further create foregrounding. Use of local dialect in a multimodal advert is a powerful tool which makes it easier to connect with the target audience on a more personal level. This creates familiarity and relatability, which enhances the effectiveness of advertising.



Figure 7: AD 4: KFC Machakos



Figure 8: AD 12: KFC Kakamega

Foregrounding through use of language can also be observed in Ad 12, in which, other than the use of language, there is also the use of colour, with the words that are in emphasis written in a different colour as compared to the other words. The text "MULEMBE KFC INGOKHO IS COMING" with foregrounding put on "MULEMBE and INGOKHO" with the words being in red while the rest are in black. In both Ad 4 and Ad 12, the use of local

dialect has been used as a way of foregrounding and putting emphasis on the important part of the advert.

Linguistic foregrounding has been done on Ad 7, 8 and 10 where they have used colour. The choice of using brand colours as a way of foregrounding the important text in the sentence is to influence the audience's perception of the message. By using a brand colour, there is a creation of a connection between the advert and what it advertises.



Figure 9: AD 10: CO-OP Bank

## Logos as Visual Resources

Another visual technique used in multimodal advertisements is the use of Brand Logos. In advertisements, brand logos are used as a strategic approach to enhance brand recognition and create a visual identity that resonates with the audience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Use of brand logos presents a visual representation of the brand's values, personality and offerings and thus logos are very important elements in any multimodal advertisement. Logos create a cohesive visual identity for the brand. Advertisers usually place the logos strategically within the advertisement, which may help in evoking emotional responses and go on to enhance brand loyalty among consumers. Logos create a deeper connection with consumers.

Placing the brand logo higher in a multimodal advertisement can have a bigger impact on consumer perceptions and product evaluations. Many brands place their logos higher on packaging, and they do this despite brand familiarity, and these brands tend to elicit more favourable perceptions from consumers. Higher brand logos have the advantage of enhanced visibility. When a logo is placed on top of an advert, there is a likelihood of an increase in visibility for the brand and also recognition. When placed higher, consumers will likely see the logo as the first thing, and this increases brand recall when the consumers meet the same brand in another advert. Many brands position their logos at the top of an image because the upper section is conventionally associated with the "Ideal" zone — representing

what is aspirational or valued (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The logo in each advertisement functions as a compositional anchor that maintains visual coherence and brand identity. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasise that information value—the spatial positioning of elements—affects interpretation. Empirical studies also support this visual principle, showing that logos placed higher on packaging or advertisements elicit more favourable brand perceptions and recall (Dong & Gleim, 2018; Sundar, 2015). When placed in the upper area, the logo becomes one of the first elements the viewer encounters, enhancing brand recognition and memory. Thus, semiotic positioning aligns both with visual grammar theory and with consumer behaviour evidence, reinforcing the communicative power of spatial composition in multimodal advertising. This positioning naturalises the brand as the ultimate source of information and trustworthiness. Ads 7, 8, 10 and 11 have all placed the logo at the top of the advert. The positioning varies with some having the logo at top right, some at the top centre, while others at the top left. Ad 7, 10 and 11 have used the top left position. Placing the advert at the top left position is considered the ideal position, and the logo always acts as a watermark for the advert. This position makes the logo stand out distinctly from other branding, and this enhances viewer engagement and response rates. Placing the logo at the top left increases the visibility as most of the readers will contact the logo first, hence creating an identity with the brand.



Figure 10: AD 11: Co-Op Bank Financing

Ads 5 and 3 have placed the logo at the top centre, although they have also complemented it with another set of logos at the bottom of the advert. Using the top centre position creates a strong focal point and draws immediate attention to the brand identity. The centre logo is seen as a headline or title for the advert. The central placement can work well in emphasising the brand name or logo, which is a key element within the advertisement.

Ad 8, on the other hand, placed the logo in the top right position. The top right position seems redundant or cluttered, but it is still an effective way of enhancing brand recognition and memorability. This placement increases brand visibility and impact without disrupting the viewer's experience (Dong & Gleim, 2018; Sundar, 2015). When the logo is placed at the top right, it may be the last element that the viewer sees and may also be disrupted by the main advert in its visibility.

Another position for the logo is the bottom right corner, and this is also seen as a strategic option which may go a long way to enhance brand visibility and recognition. When the logo is placed on the bottom right, it creates less saturation and can be a way to help the logo stand out, especially when aiming to engage viewers, and may boost response rates. At the bottom right, the logo stands out from the rest of the other elements of the advert, hence becomes unique and easily recognisable. This position offers an advantage and makes the advert less saturated and cluttered. Ads 1, 2, 4, 6 and 9 have all used the logo on the bottom right corner.

### **Images in Advertisements**

Images in the sampled advertisements operate as central vehicles for representing experiences and social relations. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) representational metafunction explain how visual elements depict participants and actions. This integration of images with text helps reinforce the intended message of the advertisement, making it more memorable and persuasive to viewers. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), meaning in multimodal texts arises from the interplay of different semiotic modes such as image, colour, and writing, which work together to create a

unified communicative act. In advertisements, this visual-verbal interaction strengthens message coherence and emotional appeal, enhancing how viewers interpret and recall the content. Similarly, Bateman (2014) notes that the combination of linguistic and visual resources produces richer, more contextually grounded meanings than either mode could achieve independently. Thus, images in advertisements do not merely illustrate verbal text but function as integral meaning-making resources that engage viewers affectively and cognitively, fostering a cohesive and persuasive brand narrative.

One way in which images are used in multimodal adverts is to foreground them. This involves emphasising the visual element to attract attention and convey meaning. Just like foregrounding in advertising text, in images, it can be done in several ways. In many adverts, there is usually the use of foreground images and background images, and this is usually done with a purpose.

Foregrounded images provide a highlight of the key aspects of the advertisement, which may include products being advertised, and this makes them more prominent and eye-catching. The foregrounded images serve as focal points which highlight the essential aspects of the advertisements, and this focus usually helps in drawing the viewer's focus to specific details that the advert is conveying.

Across the twelve ads, the use of human figures, gaze, and gesture achieves the interactive function, visually positioning viewers as participants within the brand's world. The compositional balance—typically achieved through central framing and contrast—produces textual cohesion, enabling smooth integration between linguistic and visual elements. Each advertisement thus demonstrates the multimodal orchestration of meaning that aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework, where representation, interaction, and composition converge to shape viewer perception and emotional response.

### **Gaze and Viewer Engagement**

Another crucial visual aspect evident in the advertisements is gaze, which determines the level of

engagement between the viewer and the represented participants. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), gaze is a central marker of *contact* in visual communication, shaping interpersonal meaning between the image and the viewer. When a participant looks directly at the viewer, the image performs a demand, inviting interaction and establishing an emotional or persuasive connection. In contrast, when participants look away, the image performs an offer, positioning the viewer as an observer of a depicted event rather than a participant in it.

In the analysed advertisements, both gaze types are strategically used to shape interaction. Direct gazes appear prominently in Ad 8, where individuals face the viewer to express confidence, friendliness, and inclusion. Such design constructs interpersonal meaning by engaging the audience directly, inviting them to connect emotionally with the brand. Direct gaze occurs when participants in an image look

straight at the viewer, creating the illusion of eye contact and establishing an interpersonal connection. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain, this form of gaze represents a "demand," inviting the viewer to enter an imaginary social relationship with the represented participant. Through this visual interaction, the advertisement seeks to evoke engagement, intimacy, or trust, positioning the viewer as an active participant in the communicative exchange. When used strategically, direct gaze can personalise the message and humanise the brand, making the advertisement more compelling and emotionally resonant.

Conversely, indirect gazes are evident in Ads 1, 2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10 and 11 where participants look toward the product or another person rather than the viewer. This creates a narrative offer, encouraging the audience to observe rather than interact.

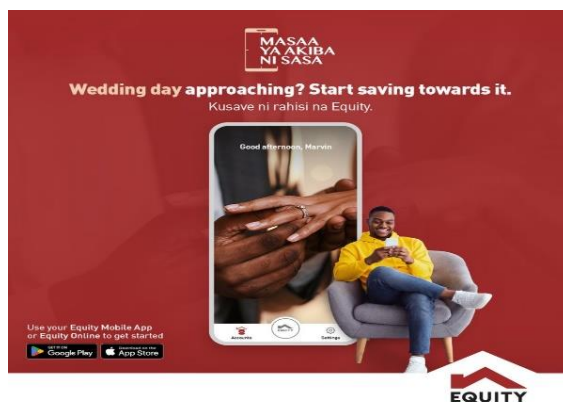


Figure 11: AD 2: Equity Bank Saving



Figure 12: AD 9: Co-Op bank Back to School

In Ad 1, for example, the couple's mutual gaze establishes intimacy, positioning the viewer as an onlooker of a shared experience that reinforces the linguistic message "DATE NIGHT DELIVERY." Here, gaze supports the textual meaning and maintains narrative realism, reflecting what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) term the *interactive metafunction*—how visual design enacts social relations between producers, participants, and viewers. Indirect gaze occurs when participants look away from the viewer, often toward another participant or the product being advertised. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this "offer" type of gaze positions the viewer as an observer rather than a participant in the interaction. Instead of demanding engagement, the represented participants "offer" information for contemplation, allowing the audience to interpret the scene from a detached, reflective standpoint. In advertisements where participants gaze at the product rather than the viewer, attention is subtly redirected to the object of focus, inviting the audience to share the represented participant's admiration or evaluation of the product. This technique not only emphasises the product's significance but also naturalises its desirability within the depicted scenario, thereby reinforcing the persuasive intent of the advertisement.

Through deliberate alternation between direct and indirect gaze, advertisers regulate viewer involvement and emotional distance. Direct gazes function as calls to action, while indirect gazes enhance storytelling and authenticity. This strategic use of gaze not only guides attention but also humanises brand communication, fostering effective

and relational engagement central to effective digital advertising.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has demonstrated that effective X advertising in Kenya relies on the integration of linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic resources. From foregrounding to symbolic representation and layout design, advertisers use a combination of verbal and visual cues to communicate persuasive, relatable, and branded messages. Overall, the analysis demonstrates how multimodal resources—such as colour, typography, layout, gaze, and verbal-visual integration—work interdependently to construct meaning in the selected advertisements. Guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual grammar, the discussion reveals that each semiotic choice performs distinct, yet complementary communicative functions aligned with the representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions. The representational aspects depict social actors and actions; the interactive features, including gaze and distance, manage viewer engagement; and the compositional structures organise visual hierarchy and salience to guide interpretation. Through this interplay, the advertisements not only persuade but also position the viewer within a designed communicative relationship, blending linguistic and visual cues to produce cohesive, culturally resonant meanings. Hence, the multimodal analysis reaffirms Kress and van Leeuwen's assertion that meaning is not located in individual modes but emerges from their orchestration within a unified semiotic ensemble.

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