

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rall20

Complementarity of communicative modes on meaning making in Tanzania's digital telecom marketing: A social semiotic multimodal perspective

Emmanuel Ilonga & Gastor Mapunda

To cite this article: Emmanuel Ilonga & Gastor Mapunda (2022) Complementarity of communicative modes on meaning making in Tanzania's digital telecom marketing: A social semiotic multimodal perspective, Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 40:1, 87-99, DOI: 10.2989/16073614.2021.1999832

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2021.1999832

Published online: 07 Mar 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rall20

Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies 2022, 40(1): 87–99

Copyright © NISC (Pty) Ltd

SOUTHERN AFRICAN LINGUISTICS
AND APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES
ISSN 1607-3614 EISSN 1727-9461
https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2021.1999832

Complementarity of communicative modes on meaning making in Tanzania's digital telecom marketing: A social semiotic multimodal perspective

Emmanuel Ilonga[1] and Gastor Mapunda[2]*

[1] Department of Languages and Literature, Dar es Salaam University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

[2] Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, College of Humanities, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

**Correspondence: mapundag@gmail.com*

Abstract: This article examines the complementarity of the communicative modes for making meaning in digital telecom advertisements. Using a social semiotic multimodal approach in its data analysis, we utilise the metafunction and composition frameworks for the interpretation and discussion. The study shows that advert makers incorporate various modes which represent real-life objects and experiences to promote products and services. The modes establish and reinforce marketing and social relationships between makers and potential customers. In the adverts, visual modes are often elaborated on through texts. In composition, the study shows that advertisers utilise various patterns in organising the modes. The makers also use various compositional properties to indicate the prominence of the modes. In addition, they deploy discrete frames to separate units of information. As such, the combination of all these modes as an integrated system in the digital telecom advertisements enables the makers to negotiate meaning with consumers.

Introduction

The main intent of marketing through advertisements (ads) is to persuade potential consumers to purchase products or services (Frith 1997). However, its success relies on appropriate choices, selection and a thorough organisation of a variety of distinct communicative modes to construct patterns for meaning-making. In this regard, ad makers organise varieties of communicative modes to negotiate meaning with their audience. One intriguing query lies in the ways in which the choices, the selection, the design and coherence of distinct communicative modes[1] are organised as an integral unit to construct meaningful expressions. The proper selection of the modes in ads may guarantee consumer's positive responses and feedback. Otherwise, they may not be prompted to pay attention to the promotional ads.

Scholarship on human communications (Finnegan 2002), advertising (Cook 2001), social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) and multimodality (Jewitt 2005; 2008; Kress 2011; Jewitt and Henriksen 2016) concur that language is just one component, among many, deployed by individuals in communicating. Human communication merges a collection of various communicative modes. We choose, organise and integrate different semiotic resources from a pool of alternative choices available at our disposal to express our intentions. These modes do not occur randomly, but rather, they are carefully chosen and used appropriately as an ensemble in the sense-making process. As such, we contend that analysing texts only in ads, irrespective of other semiotic modes, may result in the generation of partial meanings because the other modes, apart from texts, also serve to negotiate meaning. However, these semiotic modes may vary in respect of multiple circumstances, including context and the maker's interests.

Given that this article engages in social semiotics and multimodality approaches, it is important to familiarise ourselves with the meaning of modes. Jewitt (2008: 246) views modes as 'organized sets of semiotic resources for meaning-making'. These modes vary in contexts, shapes, etc., and they may

take tangible or intangible forms. For instance, semiotic resources used by teachers and students in a political science classroom may differ from semiotic resources used on social media. This is due to the fact that communicative modes are bound to culture and context. Kress (2011) regards modes as bound to a particular social group. These modes, according to him, must be understood and accepted by a social group as meaning-making resources in communicating. Therefore, we regard modes such as writing, images, colours, layout, body gestures, facial expressions, actions, sounds, architecture, artefacts, space, clothing and so on as modes for making meaning (Jewitt 2008; Owyong 2009; O'Halloran 2011; Djonov and van Leeuwen 2018).

Finnegan (2002) contends that in communication, we tend to use various semiotic modes to express and accomplish our needs. However, some of the modal resources have been given less attention, and language, which is just 'a cog' in a big machine, is prioritised. But, Kress (2011) suggests that no mode is more privileged than others. They participate equally to generate meaning as a whole. Advertising discourse provides a platform through which multiple semiotic modes are used. However, similar to advertising practices, which change across time and space (Cook 2001), semiotic modes go through the same procedure. Advanced technology has necessitated remarkable changes in the advertising industry. Corporations, institutions and individuals in the contemporary world use online resources such as social media platforms for the promotion of goods and services. In these cases, we anticipate that even the choice of semiotic modes and their designs and layout may vary from one advertising context to another. These variations may call for the use of an appropriate tool of analysis to examine and account for the selection of modes from an array of communicative modes.

This article extends the literature on social semiotics and multimodality to the digital advertising context. It analyses communicative modes used in online telecom ads in Tanzania. As Kress (2011) proclaims, communicative modes reflect the interests of the creators thereof. Given the wide range of modal resources at our disposal, ad makers take full advantage of various options to make the ads more meaningful to audiences. This article adopts a social semiotic multimodal approach to analyse distinct ways through which the semiotic resources used in digital telecom ads address the interests of the makers. It examines the ways in which different communicative modes are organised, and how they reflect the potential meanings in relation to world experiences. Furthermore, it attempts to unveil the aspect of cultural affordances found in the choices of modal resources to accomplish advertising intent.

Social semiotic multimodal approach

This article embraces a social semiotic multimodal approach to analyse various communicative modes used in Tanzanian online telecom ads. This approach offers a useful tool of analysis which enables us to make sense of the interrelatedness between the mode makers (advertisers), the technology involved, the chosen semiotic modes and the context surrounding the application of the modes to negotiate meaning (Jewitt and Henriksen 2016). This approach acts as a merger of the social semiotic approach and the multimodal approach which are briefly elaborated on below.

The social semiotics perspective is an outcome of Michael Halliday's functional linguistics theory (Jewitt and Henriksen 2016). From Halliday's perspective, language is a 'product' of social practices and its use depends on functions (Jewitt et al. 2001). These functions in turn address communicative requirements. Jewitt et al. (2001) add that Hodge and Kress (1988) expanded Halliday's standpoint from the focus on language to 'sign making', with a justification that communities choose different forms of semiotic resources and use these resources to achieve communication goals. Hodge and Kress (1988; cited in Xu 2012) offer two premises under the social semiotic theory which stipulate the relationship between language structures and social functions. First, the language structure must be understood in relation to the social functions it serves. Second, it is paramount to examine various forms of signs as an integrated aspect for meaningful interpretation. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that the key element in this theory is 'sign'. They maintain that people may wish to communicate a message, so they share it through semiotic signs. Hence, they have choices from different forms of communicative modes. Kress and van Leeuwen extended the theory to the analysis of visual grammar, in which, various communicative modes, including images, are analysed for meaning-making. These developments take us to the multimodal perspective.

It is hinted that previous scholarship on linguistics and history, among others, studied various semiotic modes in isolation (Kress 2011). For instance, linguistics focused on language and its properties, while images were studied by art historians. But, it was later realised that the modal resources depend on each other to make meaning. Hence, studying one of them, for instance language, while ignoring other modal resources such as the images, colours and layout accompanying the text may end up generating a partial meaning. Therefore, the multimodal approach was conceived to analyse semiotic modes other than language to negotiate meaning (Iedema 2003). Multimodality centres on the assumption that language is just one mode among many communicative modes which facilitate meaning when used appropriately. Thus, meaning is made following an ensemble of semiotic modes including body gestures, art, sounds, actions, images and facial expressions, to mention but a few.

Kress (2011) emphasises that social semiotics and multimodality enable researchers to understand the concepts of meaning, meaning-making, sign makers and their interests and challenges that they may come across in the process. Given the challenges of analysing visual modal resources as a framed artefact, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) developed the means – the grammar of visual design – to analyse visual semiotic resources for meaning-making. The present study adopts the social semiotic multimodal approach – a merger of social semiotics and multimodality to analyse digital telecom ads. The social semiotic multimodal approach provides a way to analyse visual semiotic modes, understand the complexities of meaning-making and the interrelatedness of the modes and society and the technologies involved in production, etc. (Jewitt and Henriksen 2016). This study applies the metafunctional meanings and composition frameworks from social semiotics and multimodal approaches to analyse visual semiotic modes in selected digital telecom ads.

Methods

Given the fact that the use and status of the internet and social media have improved in Tanzania, individuals, corporations, institutions and government agencies have created social media accounts (Ilonga 2021). These accounts are used to access and publish information, videos, photos and experiences. Facebook is one of the popular social media platforms in the world. By 2018, first quarter data showed that Facebook had about 2.19 billion active subscribers and about 1.74 billion smartphone active subscribers (Hu et al. 2018). These subscribers interact by sharing videos, images, information and hyperlinks. Apart from that, Facebook has become one of the useful social media platforms for researchers as it provides plenty of research data and research participants.

In marketing potentiality, this platform has attracted the interests of telecom corporations in Tanzania. They publish ads on Facebook, and use the platform to connect with potential customers by posting information on their goods and services. They also invite complaints and suggestions through the platform. The shared ads consist of semiotic resources. Ad makers, as underscored by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), have choices to make regarding the communicative modes to use in the ads so that the ads accomplish the interests of the makers. This study examines six telecom ads sampled from Facebook in respect to metafunctions and composition.

Communicative modes in the digital telecom ads

This section is organised into two subsections. The first subsection talks about how the metafunctional framework is used to address the meanings of the semiotic resources used in the telecom ads. The second subsection presents the compositional properties of the ads as well as the discussion. In this part, we attempt to analyse various configurations used by telecom ad makers to organise distinct semiotic resources to construct meaningful patterns which may facilitate meaning-making.

Metafunctional meanings in telecom ads

In this subsection, we use the metafunctional framework to examine the meanings expressed through the digital telecom ads. The analysis of data is organised around three meanings: ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. Through these functions, we address the potentiality of the meanings shared through multiple semiotic resources in the telecom ads.

Ideational meaning in telecom ads

The literature on ideational meanings (Johnson 1992; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Ledin and Machin 2019) envisages ideational meaning as a resource which people may exploit to share experiences of the world. According to these authors, language is a mode which interrelates the different parts of the text, and it expresses people's endeavours. Through language, Ledin and Machin (2019) posit that ideational meaning is achieved through the relationship between verbs and objects in linguistic constructions. However, their perspectives were restricted to language only. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) expanded this approach to account for the analysis of visual communicative modes. These authors argue that we have multiple choices of semiotic resources when we communicate. Each modal resource used in visual communications accomplishes a particular goal. The visual modes represent actual entities, processes and experiences.

To exemplify this type of meaning, we cite from Jewitt and Henricksen (2016). From their study on *Pinterest*, a social media platform, we observe that in the selection of images to pin and share in their profiles, the participants' Pinterest profiles show that User 1 preferred to share (pin) images from other Pinterest profiles, whereas User 2 shared images from other websites other than Pinterest. Each user shared images which represented their interests and experiences. For instance, User 1's themes included clothes and home decorations, while User 2 shared images of meals, home decorations and architecture, among others. These choices of communicative modes by these two Pinterest users serve to represent real-life experiences and aspirations. Ad makers also may have several modes to choose from and incorporate in ads, which may also represent experiences. In Figure 1, the chosen semiotic modes in context represent real entities in the world and their interrelatedness facilitates meaning.

The ad in Figure 1 contains various communicative modes. But in metafunctional meaning, the focus is grounded on how the modes reflect experiences and realities. This ad promotes home schooling following the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in 2020. The top left part of the ad features the telecom company name – Halotel. The right side shows the heading of the advertised service and a short description. It reads: *halostudy, huduma ya kujisomea kwa njia ya mtandao* 'halostudy, online learning service'. The description of the service includes the website (www.halostudy.co.tz) which a student may use for studying. The bottom left side features an image of a person. The face of the person appears to focus on what we may assume is a laptop. The right hand is below the chin, while the left hand is touching the device. Adjacent to the image, we assume the name *Edson* belongs to the person that appears on the left side of the ad. The word kisomo means 'reading', describing his actions.

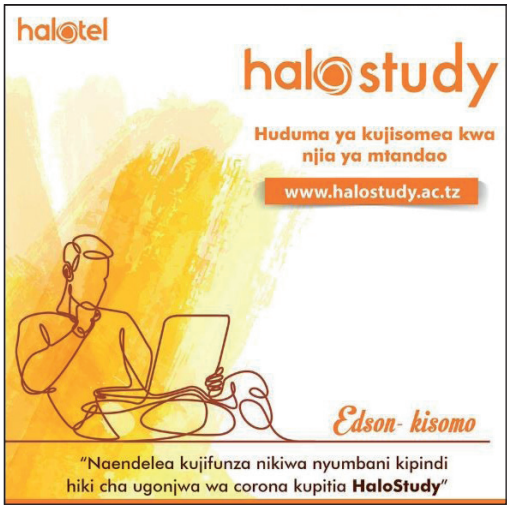


Figure 1: Ideational meaning in telecom ads (April 2020)

This ad features communicative modes which represent realities and experiences. Soon after the outbreak of COVID-19, experts advised countries to carry out lockdown measures to curb the spread of the deadly virus. In March 2020, the government of Tanzania locked down the country which witnessed the closure of all schools and universities. During this period, online learning was encouraged and initiatives were taken for students and parents to access online materials. Halotel Tanzania supported that proposition and introduced the online learning service. This is exemplified by the text at the bottom which reads: *Naendelea kujifunza nikiwa nyumbani kipindi hiki cha corona kupitia halostudy* 'I keep on studying during this coronavirus period through *halostudy*'. The communicative modes in this ad represent the realities and experiences of the world. The text disseminates information on e-learning – which was adopted by different countries during the lockdowns. The images (of the person and the laptop) in the ad represent actual experiences too. E-learning was not a new learning approach at that time. But, given the pandemic circumstances affecting the world, this approach was inevitable. The integration of the text and its information, the image of the person holding what appears to be a laptop as a single unit of information accomplishes meaning-making.

Interpersonal meaning in telecom ads

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) posit that through language, individuals perform numerous activities. Language accomplishes a social function. It allows individuals to establish person-to-person and social relationships with others in our localities and beyond (Johnston 1992: 30). This function of language gives room for person-to-person communication and is thus labelled 'interactive and personal'. In communicating, this type of meaning is manifested through statements, inquiries, orders and suggestions. In this regard, it is considered a more active type of meaning. In speaking or writing, Ledin and Machin (2019) add that this type of meaning is achieved through the use of mood and modal verbs, for instance, the use of verbs such as 'can', 'might', 'would' and so on. In extending this perspective into visual grammar, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) added that the semiotic resources should be in a position to show the relationship between the maker of the mode, the entities which the mode(s) represent(s) and the anticipated audiences.

In pedagogy, for example, the modal resources used in teaching and learning may explicitly demonstrate the relationship between the maker of a mode, the mode, what it represents and how these three interrelated aspects determine the participants' relationships. To address this situation in pedagogy, Jewitt et al. (2001) embarked on a quest to investigate how pupils used the teacher's modes and modes from other sources to make meaning. This study realised that the teacher presented an oral discussion, spreadsheets, a microscope, onions and slides as modes to the



Figure 2: Interpersonal meaning in telecom ad (April 2020)

pupils for practical tasks. These modes from the teacher positioned them as the facilitator or the instructor who leads the way. On the side of the pupils, the researchers uncovered students' use of oral discussion, acts and drawings (a drawing of a cell) after they examined the onions through the microscope. The students' modal resources indicate that these are learners who received instructions from the facilitator to perform tasks and negotiate meanings. In this case, the mode maker/supplier (the teacher), the modes (speech, microscope, spreadsheets, action) and the receivers of the instructions underscore their social and academic relationships. In the different context of online advertising, several choices of modal resources are available, which may indicate the relationships between the ad maker, the entity/mode used and the viewer of the ad. The ad in Figure 2 may best elaborate this type of meaning.

It is worth noting that not every ad published by telecom firms promotes goods and services. It has been a cultural tendency that on public or religious holidays, telecom firms take part in the celebration or commemoration. In these special holidays, they post ads which conform to the theme of the day/event. The ad in Figure 2 represents one of those moments in which ad makers, as among the community members, take part in these occasions. The above ad delivers the Islamic holiday greeting, *Maulid*, to Muslims. It reads: *Happy Maulid Day*.In this holiday, mainstream Muslims around the world celebrate the birth of the prophet Muhammad (Jones 2006). In many countries, Muslims use this special day to remember and relive the teachings of the prophet and praise God. In Tanzania, Maulid is recognised as a national holiday.

In that regard, firms take part in these occasions by sharing greetings and well-wishes. In Figure 2, the ad makers have attempted to recreate the holiday context by using a graphical representation of *Masjid al-Haram* (The Great Mosque) of Mecca. The mosque is often used by Islamic pilgrims who are required to visit this site at least once in their lives. At the centre of the image, in front of the two towers, is the cuboid-shaped structure known as the *Ka'bah*. This structure is located at the centre of the mosque and it gives the direction of prayer. The *Ka'bah* and the *Masjid al-Haram* are regarded as among the most important sites in the Islamic world. The ad makers reconstruct the actual mosque context in the ad to imitate the most sacred site for Muslims. Through these semiotic resources, the holiday, images of the mosque and the *Ka'bah*, the firm's brand name and the message in the ad, we establish that the ad makers in this context take part in social responsibilities. The relationship between ad makers and target audiences extends from business to social. The ad makers exploit this approach to strengthen the connection between themselves and potential Muslim consumers.

Textual meaning in telecom ads

Textual meaning according to O'Halloran (2011) is about that meaning obtained from coherent texts and other units. Textual meaning ascertains the information flow in which the *theme* of the syntactic structure and the *rheme* must be present (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Coherence is an important property of any text (Kress 2011). Textual coherence enables one to establish its internal grammaticality and the relationship between the text and other external properties, including the social context in which it is applied. Coherence is also addressed through visual semiotic resources. Through this metafunction, the meaning from visual semiotic modes is realised through text and its coherence within and outside the text (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). It is suggested that in some instances diagrams as modes may become semantically blurry, thus texts may provide clarifications. Visual semiotic resources must be in a form which gives the text room for elaboration.

In an attempt to address this case, Kress (2011) presents two pictures of sign boards which inform drivers on how to access car parks of two different supermarkets on two roads in London. The sign boards feature several communicative modes including colours, layout, writing, font size and images. The signs have the supermarkets' business names on the top, the car park layout on the left and a short description of the message. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have stressed on textual meaning, the visual modes used must be able to produce text because the presence of the layout, colours and images without text might confuse drivers who are not familiar with the surroundings. Through this scenario, we see the importance of texts in elaborating other semiotic modes. Similarly, in the advertising context, modal affordances other than the text used in ads should be able to produce text for clarifications, as we see in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Textual meaning in telecom ads (April 2020)

On the one hand, semiotic modes other than the written language are informative enough to express the intent of the maker. However, on the other hand, the modes may not be self-explanatory enough to inform the audiences of the intent of the structure or image. In that case, the written text should be offered to clarify. The ad in Figure 3 promotes payments for electricity tokens through *Halopesa* – an electronic transaction service from Halotel. The heading *Umeme mtelezooo* features two linguistic repertoires. The first one is the morphological elongation of the item *mtelezo* 'slippery', and second, the same item has been used as slang in this context. In literal translation, *umeme mtelezo* 'slippery electricity' translates as 'fast electricity service'. The description of the service reads: *Furahia msimu huu wa sikukuu kwa kununua luku bila makato na Halopesa* 'Celebrate this holiday season by purchasing *LUKU* without charges through Halopesa'. *LUKU* stands for *Lipa Umeme Kadiri Unavyotumia* 'pay for electricity as you consume'. The service allows a customer to receive tokens to recharge digital electricity meters.

Apart from the text, we observe an image of an electric bulb. The bulb is yellowish and silver. The bulb is surrounded by thin lines as a sign that the light is on. The text at the bottom of the ad reads: *Piga *150*88#* 'Call *150*88#. This is the *Halopesa* service number. The text is comprehensible even in the absence of the bulb. However, to emphasise the advertising goal, the ad makers featured the bulb as a sign for what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 178) refer to as a 'pictorial representation of the "promise" of the products'. The bulb offers the promise which a customer may benefit from once they pay for electricity tokens through *Halopesa*. Through the visual mode, the ad makers illustrate their intentions – to persuade mobile phone users to purchase *LUKU* through *Halopesa*. The image in this context visualises the text and the opposite is also true.

Composition of the digital telecom ads

This subsection addresses the composition of the digital ads in relation to the modes used by the telecom ad makers. This part employs three means of analysis, namely information value, salience and framing. Here, we discuss how the arrangement and interaction of the modes relate to one another to make meaning. In this case, we focus our attention on the directionality of the modes, the degree of prominence and interrelatedness.

Information value in telecom ads

Information value relies on the 'placement of elements (participants and syntagms that relate them to each other and to the viewer) [which] endows them with the specific informational values attached to the various "zones" of the image' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 177). In this, we examine the ways in which the modes are placed in an image. For instance, the flow of information may take the left-to-right, top-to-bottom, or centre-and-margins directions. Each placement of semiotic modes may represent distinct interpretation of information. Kress and van Leeuwen add that, for instance,



Figure 4: Information value in telecom ads (April 2020)

the left-to-right direction may signify continuity of information, or the already known information (the given) to the unknown information (the new). In top-to-bottom placement, the top modes may evoke the viewer's feelings by showing how something is going to be (the promise). Information at the bottom may offer adequate details on the topic. In this regard, the modes placed at the top of the image are regarded as 'ideal', and at the bottom, 'real'. In the case of centre-and-margin alignment, the semiotic mode placed at the centre of the image is considered as the core, while the ones at the margins are subordinates (subservient) of the centre.

Iedema (2003) offers a perfect case on this matter. One of his objectives was to examine the arrangement of various communicative modes in iMac manuals of 1992 and an iMac installation text of 1999. In examining the iMac manual, it was realised that the communicative modes had been arranged in a top-bottom layout. The heading of the manual instructed how to switch the computer on. Other necessary instructions were provided for switching on other devices such as external hard drives. Just below the text, drawings of computers were placed to illustrate the switch-on button. The manual makers used a top-bottom approach in which the 'ideal' part was presented through texts, while the 'real' part was shown by drawings of a computer and keyboards. According to the author, this kind of arrangement privileges the text over the drawings. However, in the iMac installation text, colourful images were placed at the top (the ideal) with the text just below the image (the real). In respect to the current study, telecom ads in some cases use more than one modal layout in the same ad, as illustrated in Figure 4.

The composition of the modes in ads must be representational and interactive in such a way that the patterns become meaningful to address the interests of the maker. In Figure 4, we present two perspectives on the organisation of the modes: left to right and top to bottom. The first perspective addresses the left-to-right information flow. As has been elaborated above, the placement of the modes from left to right may entail the continuity of information from the left side to the right, or from old (known) to new information. The top-left part of the ad features the service name (halopesa), whereas the right shows the bundle – *mega bando* 'bundle'. The table of information describes the amount of money (*kiasi*), data, minutes (Halotel-Halotel) and duration (*muda*). The information in this table is read from left to right. The bottom left features an image of a topless person in the shade. The text adjacent to the person contains a name, Big Theo – *pedeshee,* which we may assume is for the person in the ad. The text below the name reads: *nikiwa na hela kwenye akaunti Halopesa nanunua MB* 'If I have money in the Halopesa account, I buy data (bundle)'. It is presumed that the quoted text in this case may have been produced by Theo. The image covers the left side, whereas the text is on the right. The arrangement of these semiotic resources reflects the left-to-right approach signalling the continuity of information flow.

In the second perspective, we contend that the ad features the top-to-bottom layout. This kind of flow presents the ideal and the real information. In this ad, the information at the top is the ideal.

It features the name of the service and the name of the bundle. But it does not offer any specific information on the packages. However, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the bottom of the ad often features more specific details. But in this case, such information (in the table) has been placed at the middle of the ad. Below the table is the information on how to subscribe to the service. *Kujiunga, piga *150*88#, chagua* '*3*', *kisha* '*2*', 'To subscribe, call *150*88#, select '3', and then '2'. The bottom part features the image of Theo,and what he is contemplating. In this arrangement, the information at the top is ideal and in the middle, it is real. It shares specific details of the bundle. These two compositional layouts of information value have been presented in the same ad. Advertisers share information through various semiotic modes. They also exploit multiple layouts to organise the modes. Depending on the nature and the amount of information, the ad makers have an array of options to use. The modes are placed in such a way that one part of the ad depends on another one to address what is advertised.

Salience in the telecom ads

In this subsection, we are concerned with the prominence of the semiotic modes. Some of the semiotic resources used in a particular context might be more or less prominent than others. The creator of the image may decide which modes are more salient, depending on their intentions. The choice and placement of the modes may communicate something about the degree of importance. But, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) insist that the degree of importance is determined by a number of aspects, including the size of an image, text, image sharpness, colours, organisation and so on. The interrelatedness of the semiotic modes may also determine which items are more salient than others. The authors add that, in most cases, the visual entities placed in the foreground are often more salient than the background modes. Further, the use of a human figure might be more salient than non-human figures.

In respect to salience, Iedema (2003), for instance, realised that the descriptive text in the 1992 iMac manual was more salient than the drawings, but in the iMac manual of 1999, the images were more prominent than the texts. In exploring communicative modes in one of the 'No Smoking Day' campaign ads, Xu (2012) showed that in the ad which featured an image of a man and a woman positioned at the centre of the ad, the visuals were the salient modes. Another small image on the left side of the ad showing a hand extinguishing a cigarette was also regarded as salient since it reflected the theme of the ad. In textual properties, the top line of text in the ad reads: 'Your big chance to'. It is then followed by another line of text: 'KISS IT GOODBYE'. According to Xu (2012), capitalisation of the words in the latter text gives it a higher degree of prominence than the former. These instances show how sign makers indicate the degree of prominence in particular communicative modes. Regarding the current study, telecom ad makers use different semiotic properties to prioritise some communicative modes (e.g. Figure 5).

Figure 5 promotes the *Mpango Mzima* bundle. The bundle offers 5GB of high speed internet, 200 minutes (all networks) and five-minute unlimited calls (all networks). The ad reads: *Mpango Mzima: GB5 kasi kubwa: Dk 200 mitandao yote: Ongea bila kikomo kwa dakika 5 za mwanzo kila unapopiga mtandao wowote*, '*Mpango Mzima*: 5GB high speed: 200 minutes all networks: Initial 5 unlimited minutes when you call other networks'. It continues with *Ntapataje MB za kuchat na mchumba wangu nimuombe hela ya saluni*. 'How would I get data to chat with my fiancé and ask for hairdressing money?' The bottom left is covered by an image of a girl and adjacent to the image is the name *Miski – slayerqueen*. The ad features various communicative modes including the text, an image, colours and other semiotic properties. In this figure, we pay attention to several semiotic resources and determine their degree of prominence. In analysis, consideration is on the text size and the type, colour and arrangement of the visual entities.

In respect to textual properties in the ad, bold font and capitalisation signify the prominence of the text. For instance, the heading *MPANGO MZIMA*, the bundle title, and *BILA KIKOMO* 'unlimited' have been capitalised. Others such as GB (gigabyte) and MB (megabyte) are often capitalised when written in short form. These capitalised words are salient since they hold vital information including the name of the package and data volume. The bold words are more salient than non-bold ones. The title of the package – *MPANGO MZIMA*, *5GB and kubwa* 'high' in *kasi kubwa* 'high speed',



Figure 5: Salience in telecom ads (April 2020)

mtandao wowote 'any network', *Dk 200* '200 minutes', *yote* 'all', the name of the character, *Miski – slayerqueen* and MB are more salient than other items which are not characterised by these properties. Numerals are also more prominent as they are structurally bigger than their counterparts (words). These properties illustrate the salient items which ad makers have prioritised and aimed for the audience to observe and concentrate.

The colour palette is another property that identifies the prominent semiotic modes in the ad. The ad features six prominent colours: white, yellow, orange, red, brown and black. Orange and white are Halotel's brand colours. Most of their ads are in white and orange. The same has been applied in this ad. A relatively large portion of the background is white and orange. In this ad, the title, the brand name and the name of the character are orange. These colours make them stand out from the rest. Red has been used in the description of the package, whereas brown has been used for the quoted text. Black has been used to paint the image for *Miski*. In this regard, we suggest that all colours in this context are prominent. Their selection is based on the information which the ad makers aimed to differentiate between.

The choice of words in this ad represents a cultural aspect with the communicative modes as a salient mode. The notable one is the use of code-mixing in the quote '*Ntapataje MB za kuchat na mchumba wangu nimuombe hela ya saluni*'. The item *kuchat* 'to chat' is a mixture of a Kiswahili infinitive morpheme *ku-* 'to' and the English item 'chat'. Code-mixing has become one of the prominent cultural aspects in advertising in Tanzania. This linguistic property draws from other contexts such as casual conversations and pedagogy. It is featured despite the presence of the Kiswahili equivalent (*kupiga*) *soga*.

Framing in the telecom ads

We here uncover whether the semiotic resources in images are connected, disjointed, or related in some way. Framing allows us to analyse visual modes and assess their interrelatedness (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Fine lines between separate items in the image may signal the weaker relationship between the parts of the image. The absence of framings such as lines and colours which may separate items in the images signals a stronger bond between items. In case the composition of an image lacks separation clues, then the units in the image will be taken as an integrated unit. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) exemplify that a picture collage is made up of several framing lines which differentiate parts of the image. Such a composition entails disconnected parts of the structure. It may also indicate individuality or different units of information. But an image with no framing lines shows the interrelatedness of the different parts of the image.

In examining the Pinterest users' choices of images to pin and share on the platform, Jewitt and Henriksen (2016) showed that most of the shared images lacked strong framing. The images shared objects which were closely captured with no separation boundaries from other elements. In a different context, the car park sign boards in Kress (2011) shows that a thin line has been used to separate the heading of the sign (which displays the business name), the car park layout and the description of the car park. These two different compositional features may depend on the aim of the sign, the interests of the maker and so on. Telecom ads in the present study illustrate the frames used by ad makers to separate different units of information, as presented in Figure 6.

Framing may indicate separate pieces of information. The absence of framing may ascertain the connectedness of parts of the image. Several ways exist for makers to separate units of information. The ad in Figure 6 promotes the *Mpango Mzima* bundle. The texts read: *Dk 200 mitandao yote* '200 minutes all networks', *GB5 kasi kubwa* '5GB high speed', *Ongea bila kikomo kwa dakika 5 za mwanzo utakapopiga Halotel-Halotel* 'Initial 5 unlimited minutes when you call any other network', *SMS 2000* '2000 SMS'. The name of the woman in the image is Bernadetah. The quote reads: '*Nikimwaza Edson wangu tu, nanunua kifurushi cha Mpango Mzima nichat nae*.' 'When I think of my Edson, I subscribe to *Mpango Mzima* to chat with him'. In this ad, the makers have incorporated three framings.

The first framing we discuss here is the colour palette. The background colours are white (right) and orange (left). The white background is covered by the descriptions of the package. The orange background is covered by the images of a woman, Bernadetah, and another person in the thought bubble whose name we assume is Edson. The colour framing separates those two parts. Orange is used in the circles. The ad makers have used that framing to differentiate from the white background. The second framing is the use of the circles to differentiate between the descriptions of the package. For instance, the upper circle shares information about the number of minutes. The one below it carries information about the amount of data. The same applies to the other circles. These framings are very important in this context as they share distinct information related to the package. The thought bubble features an image of another person – Edson. It appears that Bernadetah is thinking about him. The thought bubble framing separates those two individuals.

The last framing is the use of spaces. We have noted that the circles act as frames to share dissimilar particulars. Apart from that, each of the circles has been separated from each other by spaces. For instance, the top one about minutes and the other one about data are separate. This kind of framing informs us that these units of information are different, regardless of the fact that they all describe the same package – *Mpango Mzima*.



Figure 6: Framing in telecom ads (April 2020)

Conclusions

This article has analysed different modal resources used in digital telecom ads. A social semiotic multimodal approach has been used as the theoretical framework for analysing the ads. The study has examined metafunctional meanings and composition features of the modes in the ads. Ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings have been analysed. In compositional analysis, salience, information value and framing were adopted. In respect to ideational meaning, the telecom ad makers use various semiotic modes which, in one way or another, represent realities and experiences in the world. The study shows how the inclusion of images of a person and an electronic device in the ads helps negotiate meaning. These semiotic resources represent objects and experiences through day-to-day activities. With interpersonal meanings, ad makers use communicative modes which identify the relationships between themselves, the modes and the audience. Regarding textual meanings, the study shows how the text in the ads elaborates on the visual modes in the advert.

In the composition of the ads, the study shows how advertisers manipulate different layouts to organise the communicative modes for making meaning. This study has shown multiple layouts in the same ad. In terms of salience, our study has shown that the font type and size, the colours and the placement of the modes may determine the degree of prominence. In framing, this context has shown that ad makers use colours, shapes and spaces to separate units of information. We may conclude that all these communicative modes in these digital telecom ads enable makers to negotiate meaning with potential consumers.

Endnotes

[1] Following the adoption of the social semiotic multimodal theory, the terms 'modes', 'communicative modes', 'semiotic modes', 'modal resources' and 'semiotic resources' and signs are used synonymously.

ORCID iDs

Emmanuel Ilonga – https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4778-4570
Gastor Mapunda – https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5683-0175

References

Cook G. 2001. *The discourse of advertising* (2nd edn). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203978153

Djonov E, van Leeuwen T. 2018. Social media as semiotic technology and social practice: The case of Research Gate's design and its potential to transform social practice. *Social Semiotics* 28(5): 641–664. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1504715

Finnegan R. 2002. *Communicating*: *The multiple modes of human interconnection*. New York: Routledge.

Frith KT. 1997. Undressing the ad: Reading culture in advertising. *Counterpoints* 54: 1–17.

Halliday MAK, Matthiessen CMIM. 2004. *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd edn). London: Arnold.

Hu X, Rodgers K, Lovrich NP. 2018. Public preferences regarding police *Facebook* posts: A macro-level analysis. *Police Practice and Research* 21(3): 227–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2018.1531753

Iedema R. 2003. Multimodality, resemiotization: Extending the analysis of discourse as multi-semiotic practice. *Visual Communication* 2(1): 29–57. http://doi.org/10.1177/1470357203002001751

Ilonga E. 2021. Language properties of online visual commercial advertisements. In: Chebanne A, Lusekelo A (eds), *African languages: Linguistic, literacies, and social issues*. Cape Town: The University of the Western Cape. pp. 363–382.

Jewitt C. 2005. Multimodality, 'reading', and 'writing' for the 21st century. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26(3): 315–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500200011

Jewitt C. 2008. Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education* 32(1): 241–267. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X07310586

Jewitt C, Henriksen B. 2016. Social semiotic multimodality. In: Klug N, Stöckl H (eds), *Handbuch Sprache im multimodalen Kontext*. Boston: De Gruyter. pp. 145–164. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110296099-007

Jewitt C, Kress G, Ogborn J, Tsatsarelis C. 2001. Exploring learning through visual, actional and linguistic communication: The multimodal environment of a science classroom. *Educational Review* 53(1): 5–18. http://doi.org/10.1080/00131910123753

Johnston T. 1992. The realization of the linguistic metafunctions in a sign language. *Social Semiotics* 2(1): 1–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350339209360346

Jones LG. 2006. Ibn 'Abbad of Ronda's sermon on the Prophet's birthday celebration: Preaching the Sufi and Sunni paths of Islam. *Medieval Sermon Studies* 50(1): 31–49. https://doi.org/10.1179/136606906X119598

Kress G. 2011. Multimodal discourse analysis. In: Gee JP Handford M (eds), *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis*. London: Routledge. pp. 35–50.

Kress GR, van Leeuwen T. 2006. *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd edn). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203619728

Ledin P, Machin D. 2019. Doing critical discourse studies with multimodality: from metafunctions to materiality. *Critical Discourse Studies* 16(5): 497–513. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2018.1468789

O'Halloran KL. 2011. Multimodal discourse analysis. In: Hyland K, Paltridge B (eds), *Companion to Discourse*. London: Continuum. pp. 120–137.

Owyong YSM. 2009. Clothing semiotics and the social construction of power relations. *Social Semiotics* 19(2): 191–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330902816434.

Xu D. 2012. A social semiotic analysis of the multimodality of an advertisement. *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 6(1): 154–165. https://doi.org/10.1515/css-2012-0110

Received 13 May 2021; revised 18 October 2021; accepted 25 October 2021