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Perception of Information Value in the Composition of Complex Text

Perception de la valeur de l'information dans la composition de textes complexes

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Abstract: This study explores perception of information value as a communication strategy in complex text composition, using television advertisements of food consumer goods as an example. Despite the increasing complexity of advertisements, little research has examined how viewers interpret the presented information. The influence of complex textual elements on consumer perception therefore remains unclear. Using Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory, this study investigates how audiences perceive the information value conveyed in complex texts. A qualitative approach was employed, incorporating unstructured interviews and focus group discussions to explore audience perceptions. Findings reveal that advertisers strategically craft complex texts to attract and retain viewer attention. However, factors such as politics, religion, and culture shape audience interpretations. The study underscores the need for advertisers to align textual composition with audience expectations for effective communication. These insights benefit advertisers, marketers, and linguists regarding multimodal communication.

Keywords: Complex text - information value – composition - consumer goods - perception

Résumé: Cette étude explore la perception de la valeur de l'information comme une stratégie de communication dans la composition de textes complexes, en prenant pour exemple les publicités télévisées de produits de consommation alimentaire. Malgré la complexité croissante des publicités, peu de recherches ont examiné comment les téléspectateurs interprètent les informations présentées. L'influence des éléments textuels complexes sur la perception des consommateurs reste donc floue.
En s'appuyant sur la théorie de l'Analyse du Discours Multimodal, cette étude examine comment le public perçoit la valeur de l'information véhiculée dans les textes complexes. Une approche qualitative a été adoptée, intégrant des entretiens non structurés et des discussions en groupes de discussion afin d'explorer les perceptions du public. Les résultats révèlent que les annonceurs conçoivent stratégiquement des textes complexes pour capter et retenir l'attention des téléspectateurs. Cependant, des facteurs tels que la politique, la religion et la culture influencent l'interprétation du public. L'étude souligne la nécessité pour les annonceurs d'adapter la composition textuelle aux attentes du public afin d'assurer une communication efficace.
Ces résultats apportent des bénéfices aux annonceurs, aux spécialistes du marketing et aux linguistes en matière de communication multimodale.

Mots-clés : Texte complexe – valeur de l'information – composition – biens de consommation – percepti

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Introduction

Perception of information value in this article refers to how television viewers evaluate the relevance, quality, and utility of information while interpreting the intricate modes of signification in television advertisements. This perception is shaped by cognitive processes such as selection, organization, and interpretation of modes of signification (Oja, 2023). In advertising, language is creatively employed to promote and sell products to consumers. Advertisers utilize various strategies to attract and engage viewers, ultimately shaping their purchasing decisions. One commonly used strategy in television advertisements is the construction of complex text.

Meriantini (2023) conceptualizes complex text in television advertisements as a multimodal construct comprising linguistic features such as descriptions, claims, instructions, and endorsements. These linguistic elements are strategically employed to communicate product attributes, benefits, and distinctive selling propositions. The linguistic study of television advertisements has garnered increasing scholarly attention, as it extends beyond verbal discourse to encompass a symbiotic interplay of multiple semiotic resources (Bhatti and Bashir, 2024). Furthermore, the two authors contend that language in television advertisements does not function in isolation but rather operates within an intricate semiotic network, interacting with auditory, visual, and textual elements to enhance meaning transmission. Despite its significance, the efficacy of complex text in facilitating information processing and shaping consumer perceptions remains an underexplored domain. The integration of linguistic and visual modalities serves a pivotal function in capturing the audience's attention and reinforcing advertising messages. However, the interpretative complexity of visual imagery in television advertisements may pose cognitive challenges, potentially impeding viewers' meaning-making processes.

As Sattorov (2024) posits, television advertisements strategically employ linguistic mechanisms, leveraging diverse modes of signification to construct messages intended for clear and precise viewer interpretation. While advertisers conceptualize multimodal advertisements as effective and engaging, the extent to which viewers accurately decode these modes remains uncertain, a gap that this study seeks to address. This research aims to investigate viewers' perceptions of information value in the composition of complex text within television advertisements of food consumer goods. A nuanced understanding of how audiences interpret and evaluate the information embedded in these advertisements is essential for both advertisers and linguists, as it informs the effectiveness of advertising strategies and the broader semiotic landscape of televised discourse. Notably, the role of complex text in facilitating meaning-making and shaping consumer perceptions remains an underexplored area in advertising research.

According to Daly (2024), the stasis of a text can be transformed through multimodality as the juxtaposition of multiple semiotic resources generates individualized experiences and meanings. The television advertisement analyzed in this study employs a multimodal framework, wherein viewers may ascribe varying stasis of value influenced by political, cultural, and religious contexts. Moreover, the interplay of linguistic, visual, and auditory elements within the advertisement affords viewers the agency to construct meaning from the perspective it presents. This perspective aligns with the findings of Wang et al. (2024) who, in their media analysis, contend that the rapid advancement of technology has facilitated the emergence of diverse new modes of representation, thereby reshaping meaning-making processes in contemporary media discourse.

Multimodality has evolved to encompass various network-based forms, including art, literature, social media, and advertising (Comito et al., 2023). Expanding on this notion, Pauwels (2012) posits that text functions as merely one component within a broader, multifaceted presentational framework. The seamless convergence of visual and textual elements has solidified multimodality as a pivotal communicative mode in contemporary discourse. Within this framework, the present study seeks to analyze the modes of signification employed in the construction of multimodal text within television advertisements of food consumer goods. Specifically, it investigates how television audiences perceive the information value embedded in complex text. By doing so, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the cognitive mechanisms and linguistic strategies underpinning language comprehension, particularly in the domain of advertising discourse.

1. Literature Review

Modes of signification within complex texts function synergistically in the meaning-making process, as demonstrated by Newfield (2024). The author examines the linguistic and non-linguistic features employed in television advertisements to articulate gender ideology, establishing a foundational framework for the present research. The findings indicate that meaning is co-constructed through the dynamic interaction of visual and auditory elements, with linguistic and visual components reinforcing each other in the representation of gender ideology, particularly in the delineation of gender roles for men and women. However, the study does not investigate the overarching semiotic implications arising from the spatial arrangement of visual elements, nor does it determine the most effective semiotic mode for conveying gender roles. Additionally, it does not explore the extent to which the positioning of signification modes within complex texts influences audience interpretation, a critical gap that the current research seeks to address.

Ng'etich (2019) demonstrates that Kenyan television audiences are shaped by diverse modes of engagement within television advertisements. The analysis reveals that multimodal strategies are deliberately employed to captivate viewers, ultimately shaping consumer culture. This approach aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of the present research, which investigates the complexities of meaning construction within television advertisements. The findings suggest that meaning-making in these advertisements is facilitated through the strategic interplay of verbal and visual modalities, fostering intended interpretations. Furthermore, the study highlights that modes of signification are systematically designed to influence audience perceptions in ways that align with the persuasive objectives of advertisers.

Additionally, the findings underscore that viewers perceive images as discrete yet interconnected elements within the broader discourse, collectively contributing to a unified and intricate semiotic construct, an aspect central to the present study. Moreover, the research demonstrates that modes of signification enhance the persuasive efficacy of advertisements by eliciting intended responses from audiences. However, it does not examine how the spatial arrangement of these modes within a visual frame influences the construction of complex texts and their overall meaning, a critical gap that the current study seeks to address. Furthermore, while the study explores how viewers interpret modes as episodic components, it does not investigate the specific contributions of each mode to the structural and semantic composition of complex texts, an essential focus of this research.

In a related study, Jayaputri (2024) examines the representation of women across various genres of Japanese comics, with a particular focus on the portrayal of female characters in different manga genres. Utilizing semiotic analysis, she deciphers the signs and symbols that construct female identities, offering critical insights into the cultural narratives and stereotypes embedded within these visual texts. Jayaputri's research significantly contributes to the understanding of how visual media both reflects and potentially shapes societal perceptions of gender roles. While her study provides valuable perspectives on gender representation, it does not explicitly address the perception of information value in the composition of complex texts. Information value, as conceptualized by Kress and Leeuwen (2020), refers to the strategic placement of elements within a composition, shaping how viewers interpret and prioritize information. Jayaputri's analysis remains centered on the semiotic dimensions of gender portrayal rather than the compositional strategies that govern information perception.

The broader literature on multimodal discourse analysis underscores the significance of element placement in directing audience interpretation. However, a discernible gap exists regarding how these compositional choices influence the perceived hierarchy of information, particularly in complex texts where visual and textual elements are intricately interwoven. Addressing this critical gap, the present study explores the ways in which compositional strategies contribute to meaning-making and information structuring within complex visual narratives.

2. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory

The analytical framework employed in this study is the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) Theory, as formulated by Kress and Leeuwen (2020). Specifically, the complex text tenet of MMDA is utilized to examine how meanings are structured, sequenced, and dynamically integrated within the multimodal composition of television advertisements of food consumer goods. This theoretical approach emerged within discourse studies in 1996 as scholars sought to extend linguistic analysis beyond traditional textual forms, incorporating a diverse range of semiotic resources, including visual imagery, scientific symbolism, gestures, actions, soundtracks, and music. It has been developed over time to the third version in the *Reading Images Book*. By adopting MMDA, this study provides a comprehensive lens through which to investigate the intricate interplay of multimodal elements in meaning-making processes.

This theory explores the construction and transmission of meaning across multiple communicative modes, including language, visuals, gestures, and sound. Expanding on this framework, Liu et al. (2024) conducted a bibliometric analysis of multimodal discourse studies spanning from 1997 to 2023. Their findings reveal a growing scholarly interest in areas such as social media, identity, and social semiotics within the domain of multimodal discourse analysis, highlighting the field's expanding interdisciplinary scope. Television advertisements serve as a quintessential example of multimodal communication, seamlessly integrating verbal and non-verbal elements to construct and convey messages. In the context of complex text in advertisements, Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory offers a critical lens for examining how linguistic features interact with visual and auditory modalities to shape viewers' perceptions of information value.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) Theory examines the complex text, which integrates visual and auditory elements to construct a persuasive message. This analysis

encompassed, for instance, the strategic use of specific linguistic choices in conjunction with visual and auditory modalities to cultivate a distinct brand identity. Additionally, the theory facilitates an evaluation of the effectiveness of complex text in conveying information value. By investigating how viewers interpret and respond to the multimodal composition of advertisements, this study assesses the extent to which complex text is integrated with other semiotic modes and how effectively it communicates the intended message. MDA provides a robust analytical framework for exploring the interaction and integration of various modes of signification in television advertisements. It enables an in-depth understanding of how linguistic features in complex text are intricately combined with visual and auditory elements to shape viewers' perceptions of information value, ultimately influencing their interpretation of targeted advertisements.

3. Materials and Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing a descriptive research design to explore television viewers' perceptions of information value in the composition of complex texts within food consumer goods advertisements. Specifically, the advertisement of *Raha Premium* Maize Meal served as a stimulus to elicit responses from informants. Data interpretation was guided by Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory (Kress and Leeuwen, 2020) This theory provides a framework for examining how verbal and visual modes contribute to meaning-making.

The study sampled 50 informants, all of whom were shoppers and regular viewers of the *Raha Premium* Maize Meal advertisement, to assess their perceptions of information value in complex text composition. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants from Migori County, Kenya, specifically Migori Town, a region characterized by diverse cultural and religious demographics. This sample size was deemed appropriate for generating rich, context-specific insights while maintaining feasibility in data collection. The television advertisement clip used as a stimulus was retrieved from YouTube using a video search engine and a YouTube download tool. This clip served as the primary data source, providing a basis for eliciting informants' responses. Additionally, complex text extracted from the advertisement constituted secondary data for content analysis, enabling a detailed examination of textual elements such as product descriptions, claims, and nutritional information.

To enhance the depth of qualitative insights, ten interviewees from Migori Town participated in five focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted over one month. Each session was guided by a discussion framework comprising eight key topics related to modes of signification. These discussions aimed to complement individual interview data by gathering collective perspectives on the advertisement's information value and meaning-making processes. The collected data were analyzed from a multimodal discourse analysis perspective, employing a descriptive approach to examine how various signification modes were composed within the advertisement. Participants were asked to evaluate the significance and communicative impact of different textual and visual elements, offering insights into how multimodal strategies influence consumer perception and engagement.

4. Results and Discussion

The study adopts the overall meaning of complex text tenet of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) Theory as the analytical framework for discussion. According to Kress and

Leeuwen (2020), a complex text comprises various semiotic resources, including graphics, images, color, lighting, music, participants, camera angles, salience, and spatial distance. This study aims to investigate how viewers perceive and interpret the multimodal elements that co-exist within a complex text to construct meaning. Additionally, it examines how these modes interact and complement one another at different positions within the advertisement.

MMDA Theory asserts that the spatial positioning of elements in visual compositions conveys meaning. In this study, composition refers to the visual structure and organization of signification modes within television advertisements. As explained by Meriantini (2023), composition integrates multiple modes to form a cohesive semiotic entity, where the interaction between elements shapes audience perception. This research, therefore, seeks to analyze the interrelationships among modes of signification within the framing of television advertisements of food consumer goods, focusing on their role in meaning-making and viewer engagement.

Additionally, this study seeks to examine how advertisement copywriters strategically arrange, distribute, align, and integrate modes of signification to enhance meaning construction. Furthermore, it aims to analyze the ways in which these modes interact and complement one another to generate cohesive and interactive meaning within the advertisement. According to Kress and Leeuwen (2020), compositional meaning is governed by three key principles: information value, salience, and framing. This research focuses specifically on information value, which pertains to the placement and hierarchical organization of elements within a composition, shaping how viewers interpret and prioritize information.

4.1 Information Value

Information value refers to the significance and interpretative weight assigned to information based on the relevance, reliability, and communicative utility of visual images in meaning-making processes. This study investigates information value by analyzing how modes of signification are strategically arranged and positioned within an advertisement, including their placement on the left or right, top or bottom, and center or margin of the visual composition.

The discussion is grounded in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) Theory, which asserts that information value is systematically distributed across distinct compositional zones, each serving a specific interpretative function. Kress and Leeuwen (2020) conceptualize information value as a fundamental component of representational and communicative meaning in multimodal texts. MMDA Theory further highlights the structured and hierarchical organization of information, emphasizing its critical role in influencing viewer perception, interpretation, and engagement within visual compositions. The overall meaning of complex text tenet within MMDA Theory suggests that the positional arrangement of visual elements directly influences their informational significance. In alignment with this framework, the study employs the layout in Frame 1 as a reference point to analyze how composition and spatial structuring contribute to meaning-making within complex texts.

4.1.1 Composition of complex text

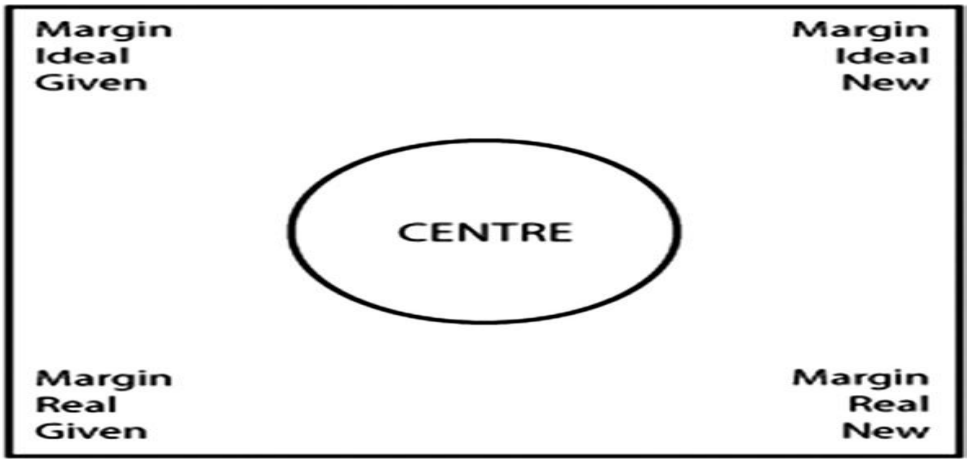


Figure 1: Distribution of meaning. Source: Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

The layout in Figure 1 indicates that the elements placed at the top of the visual composition are ideal while the other elements placed at the bottom are real. Similarly, elements on the left are given information (Known to the viewer) or linguistic information about the product. The message is given and known although abstract whereas those on the right give new information (Assumed not yet known).

The study utilizes the *Raha premium* maize meal television advertisement as an example to demonstrate how the composition of modes conveys information value. To analyze the distribution of meaning in this advertisement, screenshot graphics and images from the clips downloaded from the YouTube channel are indicated in the following frames. (Clips are only used for research purpose and not to promote any business idea).

4.1.2 Ideal and Real Information



Figure 2: Composition of the graphics. Source: Bahati YouTube Channel

Figure 2 shows on the left, a packet of *Raha premium* maize meal in front of a branded carrier bag which seems to have other packets inside. At the back is a tray for shopping found at the Super Mart. Below is a closed caption giving information where the product can be found. On the right are graphics with the name of the advertised product appearing on top.

The arrangement of images, graphics, and their Kiswahili linguistic elements was discussed in the focus group discussions to examine viewer perceptions. Informants with a strong affiliation to Kiswahili-speaking culture expressed a preference for graphics incorporating Kiswahili text, perceiving the linguistic codes used in the advertisement positively. Conversely, informants unfamiliar with Kiswahili-speaking culture perceived the use of Kiswahili negatively, experiencing a sense of linguistic alienation within the advertisement.

Using the complex text tenet of MMDA, an analysis of visual composition reveals that the graphics positioned at the top of Figure 2 symbolize the ideology of ideal happiness. Some informants associated the word *Raha* with its Kiswahili meaning, happiness, reinforcing the intended brand messaging. The brand identity is strategically established through the product's tagline, "Raha Premium Maize Meal," where *Raha* functions as a semiotic cue, signaling to viewers that consuming the product contributes to familial happiness and mealtime enjoyment. The placement of this textual element is deliberately designed to capture the audience's attention, ensuring visual salience within the advertisement.

Additionally, informants identified agricultural associations within the advertisement's graphics. The use of green-colored text was interpreted as a visual representation of a maize plantation, evoking imagery aligned with agricultural production. This finding aligns with Ng'etich (2019) who demonstrates that Kenyan television audiences engage with advertisements through diverse multimodal strategies. Ng'etich further reveals that advertisers employ layered meanings at a micro-level, strategically integrating cohesive semiotic devices to enhance audience engagement and influence consumer culture. This current study extends the findings by conceptualizing these layers of meaning as integral to the composition of modes of signification, which are analyzed through the lens of information value in the advertisement.

Moreover, the graphics positioned on the right-hand side of the advertisement are rendered in red, a color that some informants associated with brightness and connotations of love. This chromatic choice is strategically employed to enhance visual salience and evoke emotional engagement, fostering a sense of affective connection with the advertised brand. This finding aligns with Newfield (2024) who examine the linguistic and non-linguistic features utilized in television advertisements to construct gender ideology, thereby providing a theoretical foundation for the present research. Their findings underscore that meaning is co-constructed through the synergistic interplay of visual and auditory elements, where linguistic and visual modes reinforce each other in the representation of gendered identities, particularly in the structuring of gender roles for men and women.

In contrast, the present study identifies informational content strategically positioned at the bottom of the Raha Premium Maize Meal advertisement (as illustrated in Figure 2). The phrase "Available at all supermarkets" is embedded within the advertisement, implicitly conveying the presupposition that all television viewers patronize supermarkets. This textual element is deliberately placed at the bottom to enhance visibility and recall, prompting viewers to associate the product with accessibility and encouraging consumer action. Kress and

Leeuwen (2020) describe such positioning as representing "real" information, which, in this context, aligns with the ideology of place, indicating the physical locations where consumers can procure the advertised product.

4.1.3. Given and New Information



Figure 3: Composition of the images. Source: Bahati YouTube Channel

Figure 3 shows the body part of a female participant in a dress code similar to the branding in the *Raha premium* maize meal packet. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory by Kress and Van Leeuwen envisages a participant to be a visual element in a multimodal text. The female participant is positioned on the left and *the packet of the Raha premium* maize meal is on the right. A cooking stick on top of a cookery is in the middle.

The composition of the images in Figure 3 demonstrates the distinction between given and new information through the strategic left-right placement of visual elements. The informants successfully identified the human participant as a renowned celebrity in the music industry and accurately described the activity implied by the assembled images. Within the broader theoretical framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA), this spatial arrangement conveys meaning in the advertisement. Specifically, the female participant is positioned on the left to signify given information, as the copywriter assumes that viewers are already familiar with her due to her public status. Conversely, the packet of *Raha Premium* Maize Meal is placed on the right to indicate new information, which the advertisement seeks to introduce to the audience. This deliberate positioning implies that if the female participant is a recognizable figure, then the product she endorses is credible. By leveraging her public image, the advertisement reinforces the legitimacy of the promoted product, thereby persuading viewers of its suitability and desirability.

The overall meaning conveyed through the information value aligns with the complex text proposed by Kress and Leeuwen (2020), wherein the given information holds meaning potential that is extended to the new information. This theoretical perspective suggests that

given information is already familiar to television viewers, whereas new information requires their active engagement and interpretation. This finding is consistent with Jayaputri (2024) whose research significantly advances the understanding of how visual media not only reflects but also shapes societal perceptions.

In the present study, television advertisements are found to construct meaning through the strategic interplay of verbal and visual modalities. The female participant in frame 3 in the advertisement functions as a known entity, serving as the given information. Since television audiences are presumed to recognize her, they are more likely to engage with and assign credibility to the message she conveys. The advertisement introduces a new product, maize flour, by associating it with a well-known public figure, reinforcing the idea that products endorsed by celebrities hold social and commercial value. Within this semiotic arrangement, the advertised product is positioned as new information, encouraging viewers to perceive it as both credible and desirable.

4.1.4. Nucleus of Information



Figure 4: The center message in the advertisement. Source: Bahati YouTube Channel

Figure 4 presents cooked *ugali* from *Raha premium* maize meal, at the middle of the table where Bahati and the family eat. The camera zooms the hands at a close shot range, holding the *ugali* at the same time. The *ugali* is surrounded by a variety of meals to be taken.

Several informants interviewed perceived the central positioning of the ugali as a cultural symbol of unity and togetherness. This spatial arrangement evoked a sense of connection to their cultural heritage, reinforcing shared traditions. However, some informants expressed disapproval of the human participants simultaneously picking slices of ugali, arguing that proper etiquette dictates that individuals should take shared food in turns, adhering to established table manners. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) Theory asserts that images may be structured according to the center-margin principle, wherein the central element

functions as the nucleus of meaning, with peripheral elements deriving significance from it, as articulated in Daly (2024). Unlike Daly's findings, this study establishes that the central placement of ugali in the *Raha Premium* Maize Meal advertisement serves a strategic communicative function. This visual technique conveys to viewers that the advertised maize flour is ideal for preparing an enjoyable and culturally significant meal suitable for the entire family.

In line with the complex text tenet proposed by Kress and Leeuwen (2020), the central information in the advertisement composition functions as a focal point, naturally drawing the attention of television viewers and guiding them toward an awareness of the ideological underpinnings of the advertising message. This observation aligns with the findings of Sattorov (2024) who asserts that television advertisements strategically employ linguistic and semiotic mechanisms, utilizing multiple modes of signification to construct messages that facilitate clear and precise viewer interpretation.

Building on this premise, our study reveals that specific symbols and imagery may carry distinct cultural or religious significance, allowing viewers to establish meaningful connections with the advertisement. The concept of unity, deeply embedded in communal life, is visually reinforced through the central placement of ugali, which serves as a shared meal among the participants. This deliberate compositional choice resonated with the informants in the focus group discussion, as it aligned with their cultural perceptions of togetherness and collective dining traditions.

In accordance with the complex text tenet proposed by Kress and Leeuwen (2020), the strategic use of white space around the centrally placed image, as illustrated in Figure 4, serves a crucial compositional function. This white space is deliberately employed to enhance the overall visual organization of the advertisement by distinguishing more intricate and visually dense sections of the composition, thereby fostering cohesion and clarity. The study establishes that the arrangement of multimodal elements within a composition possesses a compelling ability to capture the attention of television viewers. This strategic placement is designed to guide their gaze through the advertisement, ensuring sustained engagement with the complex text from the initial frame to the conclusion of the narrative. Furthermore, in analyzing the multimodal structure of the advertisement, the study finds that audio-visual communication is effectively employed to reinforce the advertising message. This finding corroborates the assertion by Comito et al. (2023) that multimodal communication integrates diverse semiotic resources to enhance meaning-making. The incorporation of audio-visual elements functions not only to display the advertised products but also to persuade television viewers, ultimately encouraging them to take purchasing action.

Conclusion

The perception of information value within complex text composition is profoundly shaped by political, religious, and cultural factors. These elements play a critical role in influencing how audiences interpret and engage with textual and visual content, thereby carrying significant implications for advertisers, marketers, and linguists alike.

For advertisers, an in-depth understanding of these socio-cultural perceptions facilitates the development of strategically crafted messages that resonate with diverse target audiences, ultimately enhancing persuasive appeal and influencing consumer behavior. Marketers, in turn, can leverage these insights to refine branding strategies and optimize audience engagement. From a linguistic perspective, analyzing how individuals cognitively process complex textual information

offers valuable insights into meaning-making and interpretation across varying cultural contexts. This, in turn, contributes to broader research on semiotics, discourse analysis, and cross-cultural communication, deepening our understanding of the interplay between language, cognition, and societal influences.

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