



# Visual Communication in Advertisement: A Social Semiotic Analysis of Selected Billboards in Awka Metropolis

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## Abstract

This paper examines the use of visual communication in advertising, specifically focusing on the social semiotics analysis of selected billboards in Awka metropolis. The research explores how billboards use visual signs and symbols to convey meaning, and how these meanings are interpreted by the target audience. The study adopts a qualitative research design, using content analysis and social semiotics and multimodality as frameworks for data analysis. The finding of the research contributes to our understanding of the role of visual communication in advertising and provides insights into the effectiveness of billboards as a medium of advertising in the Awka metropolis. The study also has practical implications for advertisers on how to use visual communication effectively on billboards to reach the target audience.

**Keywords:** Advertisement, Awka metropolis, billboards, multimodality, social semiotics, visual communication

## Introduction

Language, be it written, spoken or visual, is a means of communication between two or more people. It is a symbol of complex signs peculiar to human beings, often used to disseminate information, ideas, feelings or emotions. Communication can be passed not only through written and spoken channels but also through visual communication. Visual communication contributes to the discussion on semiotics and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (van Leeuwen, 2004, p. 15) as the incorporation of nonverbal and verbal cues contributes to meaning realization in every communication.

Visual communication, in the words of Belch and Belch (2014), can be used to create a sense of brand identity and recognition in advertising and marketing. Visual communication in advertisement refers to using visual elements such as colours, images, typography, graphics, and other visuals to convey a message to a target audience. Through visual communication,

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brand identity is created, as the tone of the advertising message is conveyed via resources available in visual representation, which in turn helps to elicit the audience's emotions. In representing products visually to a target audience, advertisers have been found to rely heavily on billboard advertisement, which constitutes one of the media through which products are pushed to consumers (Makinde, 2024; Jamodu, 2023; Fortenberry Jr, 2007; Zafar, 2024). Billboards are essential parts of outdoor advertising, and they are used by businesses worldwide to promote products and services. Billboards are large, eye-catching displays that are strategically placed in high-traffic areas to capture the attention of a large audience. The design and content of billboards play a crucial role in their effectiveness, and as such, there is a need to analyze them in detail to understand how they work.

With the expansion in the use of billboard advertisements, which are strategically positioned in various areas within Awka metropolis (the capital city of Anambra State, Nigeria), this study explores how billboards function as a form of visual communication in advertising in Awka metropolis; it examines the types of meaning-making resources used in billboard advertisements and how these resources work together to create a more effective advertising campaign.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Billboards are a popular form of advertising in Awka metropolis, and they are often used to promote products and services to a wide audience. However, there is a need to better understand how billboards work as a form of visual communication, and how they can be analyzed using social semiotic theory. Review of literature shows that there is a lack of research on the use of social semiotic analysis of billboards in Awka metropolis. In view of the above, this research aims to fill this gap by providing insights into the ways in which billboards are used as a form of visual communication in advertising, and how social semiotic and multimodal analyses can help to create more effective advertising campaigns.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

1. to explore the ways in which billboards function as a form of visual communication in advertising in Awka metropolis.
2. to understand what types of meaning-making resources are used in billboard advertisements in Awka.
3. to help viewers understand the different meanings being conveyed by these billboard advertisements.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. In what ways do billboards function as visual communication in advertising in Awka metropolis?
2. What meaning-making resources are used in billboard advertisement in Awka metropolis?
3. How do viewers understand the meaning being conveyed in billboard advertisements within the study site?

## Literature Review

### Visual Communication

Visual communication refers to the use of visual elements, such as images, videos, diagrams, charts, and info graphics, to convey information or messages. It is a powerful tool that can help people understand complex information quickly and effectively. Visual communication has been shown to enhance learning outcomes and improve information retention. According to a study by Mayer (2001), visual aids can improve learning outcomes by up to 89%. Visual communication is also effective in conveying emotions and evoking empathy. In a study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, Nummenmaa *et al.* (2014) note that when people see a face expressing an emotion, the same part of their brain that is activated when they experience those emotions themselves is also activated. This means that visual communication can help people understand and connect with the emotions of others. Visual communication also helps people remember information more easily. It is on this note that Meyer (2000) points out that visual elements when incorporated with written information can increase recall by up to 65%. Thus, visual communication remains a powerful tool for enhancing learning outcomes, improving information retention, conveying emotions and empathy, and making information more engaging and interesting.

### Advertisement

Advertisement refers to a form of communication that aims to promote or sell a product, service, or idea to a target audience. Advertisement can take various forms, such as print ads, commercials, billboards, social media posts, and sponsored content. Advertisement has been shown to increase brand recognition and brand loyalty. In the words of Kim *et al.* (2016), exposure to advertisements can increase brand recognition and familiarity, which can lead to increased sales and customer loyalty. A study by the Association of National Advertisers found that companies that consistently advertised their products experienced an average sale of 8% (Association

of National Advertisers, n.d.). Advertisements are found to influence consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions. This view is supported by Mackenzie *et al.* (1986) when they assert that advertisements can increase the likelihood of consumers purchasing a product by up to 19%. Also, in another study, Nielsen found that advertising on social media platforms, such as Facebook, and Instagram, billboards, can increase brand awareness and drive purchase intent (Khan, 2024; & Nielsen, 2019). Advertisements can inform and educate consumers about products, services, and ideas. Advertisement also provides information about a product or service, increases consumer knowledge and leads to more informed purchasing decisions (Bettman *et al.*, 1998). It helps to promote social issues, such as public health campaigns, increase awareness and understanding of important issues among the public (Waters *et al.*, 2015). Advertisement, therefore, is a powerful tool that can increase brand recognition and loyalty, influence consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions, and inform and educate consumers about products, services, and ideas. Thus, how billboard advertisements are represented contributes to how consumer behaviour and purchasing power are influenced.

Billboard advertisement is a form of outdoor advertising that uses large, stationary signs placed in high-traffic areas, such as along highways, in cities, and near shopping centers, to promote a product, service, or idea to a target audience (Makinde & Adejumo, 2024; Adegbola *et al.*, 2021; & Belch & Belch, 2014). Billboard advertising can reach a large and diverse audience and increase brand recognition and recall. It is in line with this that Lacobucci *et al.* (2016) note that billboard advertisements can increase brand recall by up to 84%. As a powerful form of advertising, billboard advertising is found to influence consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions. Through their strategic position, this mode of advertisement can reach a large and diverse audience, increase brand recognition and recall.

### **Empirical Review**

A Google search shows limited empirical studies explicitly focusing on “Visual Communication in Advertisement: A Social Semiotics Analysis of Billboards in Awka Metropolis”; however, some studies have explored similar themes and can provide relevant insights. One such study is that of Adegbola *et al.* (2021), which examines the impact of billboard advertising on consumers buying behaviour in Nigeria. The study found that billboard advertising had a significant impact on consumers’ buying behaviour and that factors such as visual design, message content, and cultural context, among others, played an essential role in the effectiveness of billboard advertisements.

In another study, Makinde and Mgbodi (2022) conducted a study on “A social semiotic discourse analysis of gender expressions in selected Nigerian newspapers”. The study, through a social semiotic lens, draws on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2006) visual semiotic and Halliday’s (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to multimodal discourse analysis to investigate how visuals and other semiotic resources are employed in communication in the selected Nigerian newspapers. Findings from the study show a whole lot of complementarities between visuals and textual elements used in the representation of data presented.

In their study of billboard advertisements in the United States, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) found that certain visual elements, such as colour, shape, and composition, can convey specific meanings and messages to the viewers. Moving to more recent work, Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2020) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the visual elements of advertisements, including billboards. They argue that visual communication is as important as written or spoken communication and that understanding the grammar of visual design is essential for analyzing and interpreting visual texts. Other studies include a visual and multimodal representation of cartoons in Nigeria (Makinde, 2024, Aluya, & Iangba, 2024; Makinde 2023).

Overall, while there are limited empirical studies on social semiotic analysis specifically focusing on billboards in Awka metropolis, these studies demonstrate the importance of visual design and message content in the effectiveness of billboard advertising. As shown in the study by van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001), which highlights the potential of social semiotics analysis for understanding the complex messages conveyed by billboards, our current study investigates how billboard advertisements, with their strategic positioning, contribute to the semiotic landscapes of Awka metropolis in addition to their aesthetic and advertisement purposes. Awka, spelled *Ọka*, is the capital territory of Anambra, a prominent state in the southeastern Nigeria. The city of *Ọka* is one of the oldest settlements in southeastern Nigeria. The city is considered as the cradle of Igbo civilization comprises of seven groups who share common blood lineage. For the purpose of this study, Awka metropolis constitutes our study site.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2006, 2020) notions of social semiotics and multimodality. Social semiotics, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), is “the study of the formation of meaning in social life through the analysis of semiotic systems that are used in the production and reception of texts and practices”. Social

semiotics examines how meaning is constructed through signs and symbols in different social contexts. According to Hodge and Kress (1988), social semiotics can also involve the study of texts, how individuals create and understand meanings, how social interests and ideologies influence semiotic systems, and how these systems are modified as society evolves.

This general framework of social semiotics is currently receiving extension beyond its linguistic roots to explain the increasing significance of sound and visual images, as well as the fusion of modes of communication in traditional and digital media (semiotics of social networking) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006, 2020). This fusion of modes in communication is what Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) regarded as multimodal, which involves using colour, font, and layout that can work together to create a particular impression on the reader, as is common in billboard advertisements as well as the use of camera angles, music, and sound effects all contributing to the emotional impact of a scene in a film or television show. Semiotic modes, therefore, incorporate visual, verbal, written, gestural and musical resources for communication. Various “multimodal” ensembles of these modes are also included to serve as semiotic resources in the ongoing representation of meaning in social interactions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

## **Methods**

This study uses qualitative research design. Data for the study, comprising of eight (8) billboards, were purposefully selected for this study within the study site. To get the required amount of data for the study, qualitative methods, which include observation (which involves physically visiting the different locations where billboards are displayed and observing the various visual elements of the advertisements, such as the images, colours, typography, and other design elements used), photography (involving taking pictures of the billboards and using these images as a basis for analysing the visual communication used in the advertisements), and thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, visual motifs, and other design elements that are used across different advertisements. This involves systematically analysing the images, colours, typography, and other design elements used in the advertisements. For the purpose of analysis of this study, we adopt Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model of thematic analysis; this model is useful for this study in that it provides a flexible and useful research tool for a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data on the visual representation of billboard advertisements. Since our data set is on billboard advertisements, we are able to categorise

the data into two: those advertising landed properties and those on advertisements for drinks. Within these categorisations, we used the adopted theoretical framework to examine how advertisers employ meaning-making resources to push their products to the consumers via visual communication on billboards.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the researchers provide in-depth analysis of the various selected billboard advertisements in the ongoing visual communication in Awka metropolis. In the first part of this analysis, we analysed the visual communication in the billboard advertisement of Homeland United and Max Heights Estates. In the second, we examined a Social semiotic analysis of Life, Tiger, Gulder Larger Beer, Guinness and Fayrouz Billboard advertisements within Awka metropolis.

### Visual Communication in the Billboard Advertisements of Homeland United and Max Heights Estates

Using visual elements to communicate information or messages, such as pictures, films, charts, graphs, and infographics, is known as visual communication. It is still a potent instrument that can facilitate people's rapid and efficient understanding of complex material. Also, in the ongoing visual communication as regards advertisements, billboards serve as a popular form of visual communication in advertising. Billboards are large outdoor advertising structures designed to capture the attention of passers-by, drivers and commuters and to communicate a specific message or brand image to them. The figures below show how billboards function as visual communication in advertisements within Awka metropolis.



Figure 1: Showing Homeland United Estate Billboard Advertisement



Figure 2: Showing Max Heights' Advert of Sales of Land

The billboard adverts in Figures. 1 and 2 represent the advertisements of landed properties within Awka. Representation of these billboards in their strategic position contributes to the economic cum business operation within the city. As a capital city which is still undergoing structural development, a number of estate developers are shown to present their business via billboard advertisement creating awareness about sales of landed properties in different parts of the city. The use of visual communication in the billboard advertisement of these brands is to communicate a specific message. Visual elements such as images, text, colours, and even numbers used in the billboards make them easily read and understood.

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of HOMLAND UNITED ESTATE with such semiotics as represented participant of a woman with other affordances, such as colours, foregrounded image of an estate, text and numbers. The represented participant is presented as demanding information from the viewer with her gaze and her two hands raised and partially opened mouth, showing her upper teeth. The billboard is presented in a frontal view, with the information value presented in a top-to-bottom direction. The artistic design of the text “HOMLAND” along with other texts “UNITED ESTATE” bearing the name and the location of the estate positioned at the top is made salience via size and colour. The use of bright colours, white and orange, helps draw viewers’ attention to the affordances that depict the advertised product. There is a line segmenting the frame into information value that both offers and demands information. The first presents the advertised product via different affordances. At the same time, the other directs the would-be consumers to the value of the advertised product, depicting how the product could be purchased via the use of such resources as contact address, account details, mobile phone number, cost of the land, email address as well as the square meter, all serving as a mechanism for pushing the product to the consumers. Using a female-represented participant in the billboard, as is common with most advertisements, adds to attract male viewers who are most often the target audience. Therefore, the product’s name, as stated on the billboard, along with the prices and address, all contribute to the resources directing the intended customers to how the product could be acquired.

Figure 2 represents the PWAN Max Property and Solution Estate advertisement, Awka. The figure presents the visual of a female participant with other textual and visual elements as affordances for promoting the PWAN Max Estate. From a left-right and top-down information value, the image in Figure 2, with all its affordances, employs appealing semiotic



resources such as backgrounded colours, images, framing, salience, and other salient information for the viewer's consumption. Via the represented participant's gaze, smiles and body posture, the viewer is connected and, on that note, invited to be part of the ongoing representation.

Furthermore, the figure is framed into two, with the first segment in a left-right information value. At the left-hand side of the first frame is the visual of the represented participant, which depicts Kress and van Leeuwen's interactive meaning. The visual is depicted to demand information from the viewer and serves as the point of departure for the textual elements by the left; this is complemented by the artistic designs of the textual element at the right-hand side, which is presented to offer information to the viewers and at the same time depicting the promise of what the product offers. The offer, *I WILL DASH U 1 PLOT*, is premised on the condition, *IF YOU BUY 2 OUTRIGHT*, of purchasing the product being advertised. This is further elaborated with the expression *try me!*.

The second segment of the frame offered more detailed information on how the product could be purchased. In between the two segments is a line framing the advert into two parts; on this line is a rectangular shape with the information depicting the cost and square meters of the landed property along with the timeline for the payment. In this way, the property's price tag, *N2.5M*, is made prominent via its strategic positioning for the viewer's attention. Like the visual in Figure 1, Fig. 2 includes in its second frame a blue background colour, which allows the visibility of the texts that are rendered in white and red colours as well as such information as the Zenith account number, the estate's contact address, website, email, and the use of media platforms depicting the accessibility of the product online. Also, all the affordances on the represented participants are made salience via size, colour, shape, gaze cum eye contact. In this way, the viewer is presented with an image of a beautiful lady with a dark complexion and all the aura of sensual invitation. It is worth noting that the advertiser makes part of the lady's skin visible from the chest upward to make her a point of attraction. This supports the view of her being the point of departure for all other affordances in this advert.

### **A Social Semiotic Analysis of Life, Tiger, Gulder Larger Beer, Guinness and Fayrouz Billboard Adverts in Awka Metropolis**

As part of visual elements in the representation of advertisement in Awka metropolis, a number of cultural resources are used as affordances for creating awareness about the products being represented. Here, language, Igbo cultural attires, indigenous participants and local settings are affordances employed in the figures presented in this segment. Thus,

meaning-making resources, which are semiotic resources, are elements or tools that are used to communicate meaning through signs and symbols. Billboard advertisements rely on visual and textual resources to create meaning and capture the attention of passers-by. Some meaning-making resources used in billboard advertisements include images, graphics, text, colour, typography, humour and wit. In the figures below, several meaning-making resources are employed to represent Life, Tiger, Gulder Lager Beer, Guinness and Fayrouz billboard advertisements to viewers.



**Figure 3: Showing advert on Life Drink**

The billboard above uses unique affordances to create meaning and capture the attention of passers-by. In Figure 3 above, there is an image of a famous Nollywood actor, Yul Edochie, an image of the Niger Bridge with a branded text – ENJOY Life Larger Beer, an image of a sunset, a Life Larger Beer logo and a crown. There is also a text, “TURU UGO LOTA”, and its English version, “BRING HOME THE GLORY”, which serves as affordances depicting the semiotic landscape of the billboard. The text is made prominent through bold and a big font size with white colour. The Nollywood actor’s image helps create a sense of recognition, appeal, and emotional connection. Emotional connection in the sense that the Nollywood actor is a well-known Igbo actor in the movie industry. The use of an indigenous represented participant speaks volume of the product and influence consumption perception of the consumers to patronise the brand due to their familiarity with the Nollywood actor. The actor is dressed in Igbo attire, featuring the product portrayed in the advert as a testament to the Igbo culture.

Compositionally, the image represents Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2020) left-right reading direction. Using a bridge with the text *Enjoy Life* is a direct link to the name of the product *Life* to be enjoyed. Of a truth, *Life Lager Beer* is indeed produced across the bridge at the land of the Igbos,

Onitsha. Beneath the bridge are images of a bottle and a can of *Life Beer* that the viewers can enjoy. The Niger Bridge is used to signify home, while the sunset depicts a sign of hope. The use of Igbo text shows that Igbo is the dominant language in Awka. In contrast, the use of English text shows that although Igbo is the dominant language, there are also residents of Awka who are not Igbo speakers. This factor contributes to the use of English that must be considered in the product's advertisement. The text "TURU UGO LOTA" signifies a message of reward, honour, and victory. Other semiotic resources evidence in the billboard adverts include the use of bold text to convey a clear message and using bright colours that help attract attention to the billboard. The billboard has a horizontal view as it is positioned strategically on the highway for viewer's scrutiny.



**Figure 4: Showing Life Alcoholic Drink**

Figure 4 above is another advert for Life Lager Beer. In this advert, we have a visual representation of two participants: an image of Life Lager Beer and a male-represented participant. The billboard's affordances are positioned in a left-right reading direction with the textual element "NDU KA" and "STAY SAFE" placed at the centre of the billboard advert. With the strategic positioning of the image of Life Lager Beer, the product's brand identity and all its resources are made salient for viewer's attention. Here, the text "NDU KA", "STAY SAFE" signifies a message of life and safety.

There is complementarity in the representation of the billboard advertisement; for instance, the positioning of the product "Life" at the left-hand side of the frame interacts with the text and the visual of the human participant at the left to convey meaning. In essence, the text "NDU KA", which means 'life is greater' is an injunction to the young man at the

right-hand side of the image and, by extension, to all lovers of Life to 'STAY SAFE' because life is greater. By comparing the promise of what the product "Life" offers to what life itself offers, the advert has conveyed many messages as it draws the potential audience to the benefit of what they stand to get when they consume Life Lager Beer. It is worth noting here that the text "NDU KA", "STAY SAFE" is made salient/prominent via size with bold font size in capital letters as it is centralized for the viewer's attention. Also, using the Igbo language as a resource shows its use as the dominant language in Awka. At the same time, the English text complements the Igbo version, helping the non-residents of Awka who are not Igbo indigenes to relate to the advert. With its horizontal view, the billboard is strategically positioned high enough on the highway for commuters and passers-by to see it from a far distance.

The image of the man on the billboard, a celebrity, is depicted from the chest upward at the left-hand side of the billboard. The image is positioned to face the viewers and connect with them through gaze, an invitation to connect with 'NDU KA' for a great life and to stay safe. By typically framing the visual of the represented participant from the chest upward with a shot showing the face of the character, the participant is thus made prominent and visible for the viewer's attention.



**Figure 5: Showing advert on Tiger Alcoholic Drink**

Figure 5, a billboard on Tiger, presents the picture of a famous Nigerian artist, Ruger, the head of a tiger and a bottle of 'Tiger' drink. The billboard depicts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) Left-Right information value. Without framing, the advert is divided into two parts: textual elements on the left-hand side and images of a represented participant, the head of a lion, and a bottle of Tiger drink on the right. On the left side of the billboard is the text "LIVE UNCAGED", signalling to live a life free from bondage (freedom) as indicated in the picture of the uncaged tiger. The text "Live

Uncaged” demands information and is a pointer to the visual elements, offering information to the viewers. This is evident in the use of size and colours as well as the Nigerian artist, Ruger. The tiger (animal) is a metaphorical representation of the Tiger drink that is advertised. As per the billboard’s position, the advert is positioned on the highway and placed high enough for the attention of passers-by. Its strategic positioning with bold and capital letter text, along with the size of the images at the right-hand side of the frame, is made visible for viewers scrutiny. The image of the represented participant creates a connection with the viewer through gaze; this is coupled with the raised right hand of the participant, a communicative motif to the youth to live uncaged and enjoy the best of their life. This is a call to a life of freedom and enjoyment with the product “Tiger” and be bold. All these affordances are employed as resources for making meaning.



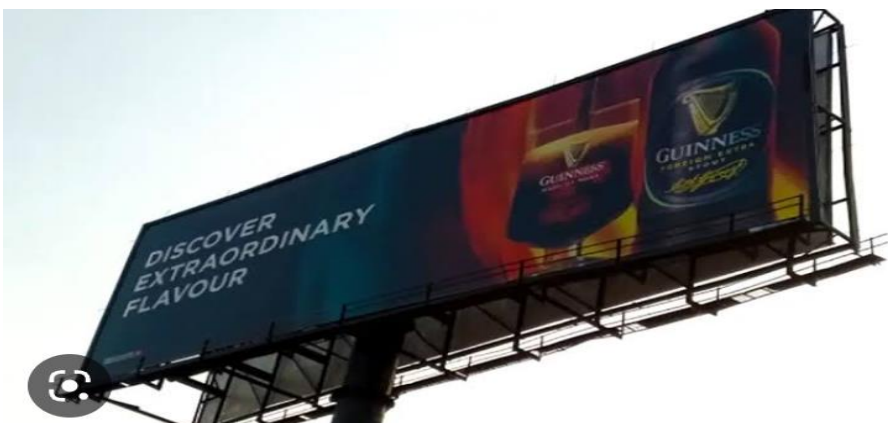
**Figure 6: Showing advert on Gulder Drink**

Figure 6 presents the advertisement for Gulder Larger Beer. In a left-right reading direction, which depicts Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2020) idea of information value, the advert presents such affordances as text and visual representation of a man, a bottle of Gulder Larger Beer and a branded cup. On the left-hand side is the text, “OWN YOUR JOURNEY TO SUCCESS”, which serves as a point of departure to the visuals being represented. The text calls for the viewers and, in turn, the consumers of Gulder to *own their journey to success*. The text, “OWN YOUR JOURNEY TO SUCCESS” is a signifier that encourages viewers to take charge of their journey to success. The text is made prominent through bold text and big font sizes positioned at the left upper side of the billboard advert. Viewers may take the message as a form of motivation, and this can make them patronise the brand because they believe that when they do so, they are on their way to owning their journey to success and taking

charge. The image of the represented participant is framed from the chest up to reflect the facial and body posture of the participant. In this way, the viewer is provided with the visual of a successful man already owning his journey to success. The outfit of this participant, with his look, posture, and carriage, is used as a resource to portray his successful journey. Using the picture of a celebrity helps create a sense of familiarity with the viewers, and this helps draw the viewers' attention to the information on the billboard.

The third stage of the advertisement is the visual representation of the product, which is the focus of this advertisement. With the journey motif to success, the advertiser has persuasively woven together text along with the visual representation of the represented participant to push the product to the consumers. As an advertisement technique, viewers are first presented with the desire for success (promise of what the product offers), shown a visual representation of a successful man, and then presented with the product that will facilitate their journey to success.

It is worth noting that all the affordances used in this billboard are situated within the context of a backgrounded cityscape. A mode that makes the advertisement more powerful and attractive to the viewers. Other resources employed in the representation of this billboard advertisement include colour, colour saturation, strategic positioning, and the use of frontal angle, which invites the viewers to be part of the journey to success. By relying on a represented participant who is indigenous to the location of the advert and using an Igbo outfit with the red cap, the advertiser domesticated the advert by placing the product on the scale of localisation. These affordances contribute to the semiotic resources employed in representing Gulder Larger beer.



**Figure7: Showing advert on Guinness Drink**

In relation to Figure 6 above, Figure 7 presents multiple modes in its representation with text and two images: a branded Guinness cup and a bottle of Guinness as affordances for depicting the Guinness billboard advert. Compositionally, the billboard presents a Left-Right information value in its reading direction. At the left is the text, “DISCOVER EXTRAORDINARY FLAVOUR”, followed by the images of a branded Guinness cup and a bottle of Guinness. Through this text-image relation, the image is depicted to complement the text so that the visual provides an answer to the extraordinary flavour to be discovered. In this way, the text directs the viewer to the product to be discovered with its extraordinary flavour. Other compositional elements employed in this advert include framing, colour, and salience.

In terms of framing, the Figure is divided into two via such affordance as colour and line. The textual element is positioned on a dark mixture of colours on the left-hand side. In contrast, the visual elements are positioned in a mixture of red and yellow with a dark colour flavour. In this way, the dark and red colours form a line that serves as a vector connecting the two sides. At the interactive level, the elements of the advert are depicted to offer information to the viewers with the perspective of the object showing a frontal angle. As per the spatial mobility of the billboard, the advert is strategically positioned on the highway with affordances such as big and bold font size; the elements of the adverts are made prominent as the advertiser deploys salience in the visual representation of the elements of the advert. Via this strategic positioning, the passers-by are attracted to the advert from a distance and are propelled to look as they approach the billboard.



**Figure 8: Showing advert on Fayrouz Non-Alcoholic Drink**

Figure 8 presents the advertisement of Fayrouz, a non-alcoholic drink. Like most advertisements, the billboard has short but captivating text, an image of the Fayrouz bottle, five represented participants and some fruits. The backgrounded colour of different shades serves as a frame and a

connector to the left and right visual elements presented in the advert. Following Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) compositional meaning, the billboard presents a Left to Right reading information value with colour, connector, overlapping and form serving as the frame connecting the two sides of the billboard.

From the interactive meaning, the visual representation of the represented participants is presented to offer information to the audience, as depicted in their different strategic positioning as well as their facial expressions: laughing, gesturing, and talking to one another with gazes in different directions. Also, the composition of the objects in this advert is presented in a longshot and vertical high angle. This helps to present the entire frame of the visuals in the advert. The visual representation of the advert first presents the viewers with the image of Fayrouz drink, followed by the text "DRINK", "HANGOUT" and "ENJOY". In this way, "Fayrouz" is depicted as the best product to be enjoyed when it comes to picnics or at a time to "HANGOUT". The texts "DRINK", "HANGOUT", and "ENJOY" are signifiers that convey a message of excitement, enjoyment, and celebration. The text is made prominent through its positioning between the product and the images of the participants depicted in the advert as well as the use of big font sizes. By adopting visuals of smiling youths, the product draws the youths' attention to take an interest in the brand.

From the foregoing, this study's data presentation and analyses give insights into the importance of visual communication and advertisement, as evident in the use of such affordances as colours, texts, numbers, and images, as well as the meanings and messages conveyed by the advertisers of these products. The table below shows the semiotic distributions in the visuals presented above, giving a tabular overview of resources used for visual communication in billboard advertisements in the Awka metropolis.

## **Discussion of Findings**

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the signifiers, signified and the various signs and symbols used in the billboards under analysis. The data presentation and analysis show how advertisers use visual cues, such as images, colours and texts to communicate their messages to the target audience. Via these resources, we are able to examine how the various elements of the billboards work together to create meaning and influence the audience's interpretation of the advertisement. Overall, it provides a detailed understanding of the role of visual communication in advertising and how it affects the perception and interpretation of the audience. Table 5.1 below presents the summary of the various semiotic resources used to



convey visual communication in the advertisement of the selected billboard advertisements in Awka metropolis.

**Table 1:** *Showing summary of the semiotic resources identified in this study*

SN	PRODUCT'S NAME	SEMIOTIC RESOURCES							
		TEXT	COLOUR	IMAGES	NUMBERS	INFORMATION VALUE	FRAMING	FONT SIZE	ADDRESS/PHONE NUMBER
1	Figure 1. Homeland United Estate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Top to bottom	Yes	Big	Yes
2	Figure 2. Max Heights Awka	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Top to bottom	Yes	Big	Yes
3	Figure 3. Life Alcoholic Drink	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Left to right	Yes	Big	No
4	Figure 4. Life Alcoholic Drink	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Left to right	Yes	Big	No
5	Figure 5. Tiger Alcoholic Drink	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Left to right	Yes	Small	No
6	Figure 6. Gulder Alcoholic Drink	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Top to bottom	Yes	Big	No
7	Figure 7. Guinness Alcoholic Drink	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Top to bottom	Yes	Big	No
8	Figure 8. Fayrouz Non-Alcoholic Drink	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Top to bottom	Yes	Big	No

Figure 1 of Table 1 above shows that the advertisers use semiotic resources such as text, colour, images and numbers to communicate. The information value of the billboard is from top to bottom. The billboard is framed into two with the upper part showing the visuals that represent the product to the viewers while the lower segment presents the value of the product as well as how the product could be purchased. In Figure 2, the table shows that the advert uses semiotic resources such as text, images, colour and numbers to communicate. The information value of the billboard is depicted from top to bottom, with the billboard framed into two segments of information values (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). In Figure 3, the table shows that the advert uses semiotic resources such as text, images, and

colour but no numbers to communicate. The information value of the billboard is from left to right with the billboard framed into two segments. In Figure 4, the table shows that the advert uses semiotic resources such as text, images, and colour but no numbers as its means of communication. The information value of the billboard is from left to right with the presence of framing and salience as part of the compositional element.

Also, in Figure 5, the table shows that the advertiser uses semiotic resources such as text, images, and colour but no numbers as its means of communication. The information value of the billboard is from left to right. As part of the compositional element, the billboard uses framing in its representation. For Figure 6, the table shows that the advert uses semiotic resources such as text, images, and colour but no numbers as its means of communication. The information value of the billboard is from top to bottom. The billboard uses framing in its compositional element.

In Figure 7, the table shows that the advert uses semiotic resources such as text, images, and colour but no numbers as its means of communication. The information value of the billboard is from top to bottom. The billboard is framed. In Figure 8, the table shows that the advert uses semiotic resources such as text, images, and colour but no numbers as its means of communication. The information value of the billboard is from top to bottom while the billboard is framed into two segments following left to right information values (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

The billboards presented in this study constitute part of the predominant and common products being represented in Awka metropolis. It therefore underscores how products of these kinds with the visual representations are employed to show the culture, economic sources as well as the semiotic landscape of the study site. In conclusion, this study has provided a social semiotics analysis of billboards in Awka metropolis to understand visual communication in advertising. The study used the framework of social semiotics to analyze the visual elements such as colour, images, typography, and language as well as some aspects of cultural heritage commonly used in the representation of billboards in Awka metropolis. The analysis revealed that the billboards in Awka metropolis use a combination of visual and textual elements, cultural heritage such as indigenous participants, indigenous outfits and cultural setting to communicate messages to the audience. The study found that the visual elements used in billboard advertisements in Awka metropolis are images of famous indigenous artists, metaphorical images of non-humans, typography, cultural heritage, and language to create emotional

connections with the audience. In this way, the advertisers placed their products and brand on the scale of localisation, a term that represents how locally made products are being given prominence through local affordances. Other resources employed include colour, typography, and texts with bold and big fonts to emphasize important information and create visual interest. The study also revealed that language was an essential element in billboard representations in Awka metropolis. English was the dominant language used in billboards, but some billboards used the local language, Igbo, to connect with the target audience. The language used on billboards was often simple and direct to ensure that the target audience understand the message easily. Overall, the social semiotics analysis of billboards in Awka metropolis revealed that advertisers use visual and textual elements to create meaning and to persuade the audience to take a particular action, such as purchasing a product or service. All of these influence viewers' perception of the meaning conveyed in these billboard advertisements, which in turn help them draw meaning from the billboard advertisement via the affordances used as resources for making meaning.

### **Implications for Further Studies**

This study has implications for further research on the visual representation of billboard advertisements within the entire state to identify recurrent products being projected on billboards within Anambra state. A comparative analysis could also be carried out in other regions of the country to examine the similarities and differences existing in the semiotic resources employed in representing billboard advertisements. This will enable the examination of similarities or otherwise in the meaning-making resources employed by designers of the billboard advertisements within the country. This will also enable further research on the linguistic landscape of the various study sites.

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