

A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF LANGUAGE AND VISUAL IMAGERY IN SELECTED TELECOMMUNICATION ADVERTISEMENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines how Nigerian telecommunication advertisements use language and visual imagery to create meaning, reflect cultural values and build consumer loyalty. Drawing on semiotic theory and Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis model, the research explores the underlying messages and ideologies embedded in eight advertisements produced by MTN, Airtel, Glo and 9mobile between 2021 and 2025. The adverts were sourced from official platforms, transcribed and analysed with attention to their linguistic choices, visual elements and sound effects. The findings show that these advertisements rely on a careful combination of words, images and music to tell emotionally engaging and culturally familiar stories. Rather than simply promoting services, the adverts position telecommunications as central to everyday life and social belonging. Each brand projects distinct values: MTN emphasizes resilience and collective strength, Airtel highlights family bonds and pride, Glo focuses on unity and survival, while 9mobile celebrates ambition and shared memory. Connectivity is, notably, framed as essential to progress, identity and inclusion across all the adverts. The study concludes that Nigerian telecommunication brands build customer loyalty mainly through emotional appeal and cultural connection, not just through claims of service quality.

Keywords: Semiotics, Connectivity, Language, Visual Imagery, Telecommunication Advertisements

Introduction

Advertising is one of the most powerful forms of communication in contemporary society. It does more than promote goods and services; it actively shapes meanings, identities and social values. Through deliberate choices of language, images, colours, music and other symbolic resources, advertisements influence how people understand themselves, relate to others and make sense of their social world. Semiotics, which studies signs and how they create meaning, offers a useful lens for examining these processes. Chandler (2002) explicates that communication elements such as words, images, gestures, sounds and objects operate as signs whose meanings are rooted in culture. In the same vein, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that visual images, like language, have their own grammar and can convey complex ideas, relationships and messages. From this perspective, advertising cannot be seen as a neutral or purely informative activity. Rather, it is deeply embedded in culture and ideology. Barthes (1972) explains through his concept of myth that recurring symbols and narratives in media texts become naturalised and make socially constructed meanings appear normal or incontestable. Advertising often works in form of presentation of particular values and worldviews through familiar and emotionally appealing representations of everyday life. Studies by Tsotra et al. (2004) and Mahardika Yasa (2023) show that semiotic analyses across different cultural contexts reveal how advertisements communicate hidden meanings, cultural myths and value systems that go far beyond their immediate commercial purpose.

In Nigeria, advertising plays an important cultural role due to the country's linguistic diversity, ethnic plurality and complex social and economic conditions. Nigerian advertisements frequently draw on shared cultural experiences

such as family life, communal relationships, religion, national identity and indigenous languages to create strong emotional connections with audiences. According to Dalamu and Ogunlusi (2020), cultural familiarity is central to persuasion, trust and brand identification in Nigerian advertising terrain. Language use is another crucial consideration in this process. Akintayo (2024) describes Nigerian advertising as a creative “language game” marked by code-switching, idiomatic expressions, slogans, and the strategic use of Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages to appeal to different social groups. Modu and Bwala (2023), on the above, argue that meaning emerges from the interaction of verbal, visual and auditory elements within these multimodal texts.

Nigerian telecommunication advertisements provide a particularly rich context for examining these dynamics. Major telecom brands such as MTN, Glo, Airtel, and 9mobile do not simply advertise network coverage or data plans. Instead, they frame connectivity as essential to life, progress, care, unity and belonging. Through emotionally charged narratives and culturally resonant imagery, services like data and airtime are metaphorically presented as necessities comparable to family ties, survival or even oxygen. Against the backdrop of Nigeria’s diverse cultural landscape and uneven economic realities, this study adopts Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how telecommunication advertisements deploy signs to evoke emotion, express cultural values and reinforce ideas of resilience, unity, ambition and modernity. Although Nigerian advertising has been studied from linguistic, discourse, and sociolinguistic perspectives, (Dada, 2010; Njemanze, Mbachaga, and Omoera, 2015; Dalamu, 2017), there remains a notable gap in research that combines semiotics and CDA to analyse how language and visual imagery work together in telecommunication advertisements. Many existing studies focus on isolated features such as code-switching, stylistic devices or persuasive techniques that pay less attention to how multimodal signs operate ideologically. In particular, there is limited critical engagement with how Nigerian telecom adverts transform emotional experiences such as struggle, family separation, hope and ambition into marketing tools that foster brand loyalty while subtly shifting responsibility for success, connectivity and survival onto individuals. This study addresses this gap by offering a systematic and theory-driven analysis of Nigerian telecom adverts by using a combined Semiotic and Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Semiotics allows for the identification and interpretation of signs, symbols, colours, images and metaphors, while CDA provides tools for uncovering power relations, ideological assumptions and identity constructions embedded in Nigerian telecom adverts discourse. Taken together, these approaches offer a rigorous means of examining how Nigerian telecom adverts construct meanings of connectivity, position consumers and normalise particular ways of seeing the world. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to advertising discourse, media studies and Nigerian sociolinguistic scholarship. By highlighting the ideological and identity-shaping roles of telecommunication advertising, the study deepens understanding of how commercial media participates in cultural reproduction and social meaning-making in Nigeria. It also offers insights into how both multinational and local corporations engage with culture to secure emotional attachment and consumer loyalty to enable a broader discussion on media literacy and critical consumption.

Literature Review

Advertising is not limited to the promotion of products and services; it operates as a powerful cultural discourse that shapes perceptions, values, identities and social relationships. In Nigeria, telecommunication advertising occupies a particularly influential position because of the sector’s intense competition, wide reach and profound integration into everyday life. Telecom adverts do more than sell airtime or data. They tell stories drawn from life experience by using language, images, music, colour and culturally familiar symbols to align brands with people’s emotions, aspirations and shared identities. Semiotics offers a useful foundation for understanding how meaning is created in these advertising texts. Chandler (2002) defines semiotics as the study of signs and how meaning is produced through systems of signification. In advertising, words, images, colours, gestures and sounds function as signs that communicate meanings beyond their literal form. Early theories by Saussure and Peirce (1955) established the sign as a relationship between form and meaning. Barthes (1972) also extended this thinking to popular culture through his concepts of denotation, connotation and myth. He explained that advertising presents culturally constructed ideas such as success, happiness or progress as natural and self-evident. Therefore, through repetition and emotional

appeal, these ideas come to be accepted as common sense. Visual semiotics shows how images themselves become structured systems of meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual grammar demonstrates that elements such as gaze, framing, salience, composition and colour are not merely aesthetic choices but deliberate tools for meaning-making. In advertising, visual elements guide viewers' attention, shape emotional responses and suggest preferred interpretations. As a result, images function ideologically and subtly guide audiences in particular ways by fortifying specific values. Dada (2010) pointed out that GSM advertisements in Nigeria make strategic use of code-switching, metaphor and indigenous languages to increase persuasion and relatability. Dalamu (2017) also found out that Nigerian telecom adverts often encode ideas of modernity, speed and connectivity which present technology as a route to social mobility and inclusion. Similarly, Modu and Bwala (2023) demonstrated that meaning in Nigerian advertising emerges from the interaction of language, visuals and sound, rather than from any single mode alone. Together, these studies reveal that Nigerian telecom adverts carefully integrate linguistic and visual resources to anchor global corporate messages within local cultural contexts.

While semiotics explains how meaning is produced, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on why those meanings are created and whose interests they serve. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, which examines text, discursive practice and social practice, presents advertising as both a reflection of society and a force that actively shapes it. From this viewpoint, telecom advertisements function as discursive events that reproduce and legitimise ideologies such as consumers' viewpoints, technological accessibility and neoliberal ideas of individual success and responsibility. Van Dijk (2008) further argues that discourse plays a central role in shaping social cognition by embedding ideologies in shared knowledge and collective memory. In Nigeria, Telecom adverts frequently draw on cultural resources such as family ties, communal solidarity, religion, tradition and resilience to persuade audiences (Dalamu and Ogunlusi, 2020). Also, Ogbonna (2022) shows that advertising discourse often reinforces existing gender roles and power relations to reproduce socially dominant identities and norms. These findings make it clear that advertisements are not ideologically neutral texts but sites where power, identity and belief systems are subtly negotiated and strengthened. Tsotra, Janson, and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2004) establish that online advertising relies on culturally embedded symbols to shape consumer interpretation. Yasa (2023) also shows how telecom-style advertisements construct myths of family unity and national cohesion. These studies reinforce the view that advertising transforms products into cultural narratives. Nigerian telecom adverts have shown a similar universal pattern by combining global advertising conventions with locally meaningful signs to sell not only services but also to promote ideas of belonging, resilience, progress and identity.

Sutiah (2021) identifies strong ideological patterns in the symbolic choices used in print advertising. Also, Adegoju (2008) highlights the semiotic importance of colour, cultural references and deixis in Nigerian mobile network adverts. More recently, Amah et al. (2024) show that Nigerian telecom adverts combine emotional appeals such as love, music, humour and drama with rational appeals which present consumers as modern, ambitious, emotionally connected and socially relevant. However, while these studies acknowledge ideology, they often stop short of fully examining the depth of power relations and identity constructions embedded in these advertising strategies. From most of the literature reviewed above on Nigerian mobile network adverts, many studies focus either on linguistic features such as code-switching and metaphor or on visual elements such as colour and imagery and often treating them as separate entities. Others acknowledge ideology without systematically explaining how meaning is constructed across multiple modes or how these meanings function within broader social and power structures. As a result, there is limited integrative research that combines semiotic analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis to address both meaning-making processes and their ideological implications. This study responds to the gap pointed out above by adopting a combined semiotic and CDA framework to analyse selected Nigerian telecommunication advertisements. Semiotics is used to explain what linguistic and visual signs mean, how cultural symbols and emotional appeals are constructed, and how myths of connectivity, family and modernity are established. CDA, on the other hand, examines why these meanings matter by revealing how they promote specific ideologies, position consumers within particular identity roles and advance corporate and socio-economic interests. By integrating these

approaches, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of Nigerian telecom advertising as a multimodal and ideological discourse rather than a neutral marketing practice.

This study adopts a combined framework of Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) because the two approaches complement each other in explaining how advertising creates, circulates and permit meaning. Semiotics is concerned with how signs such as words, images, colours, gestures and sounds are used to communicate messages. It provides tools for uncovering the symbolic meanings through which advertisements connect emotionally and culturally with their audiences. Elements such as a slogan, a visual image, a bodily gesture or a particular colour choice often function as symbols that evoke ideas of hope, unity, success or belonging. Through semiotic analysis, these symbols can be interpreted to show how cultural values and emotions are represented and made meaningful within advertising texts. Critical Discourse Analysis, on the other hand, moves beyond interpretation to examine the social power and ideological forces underlying these meanings. CDA investigates how language and visual representation shape beliefs, construct social identities and normalize particular ways of understanding the world. Fairclough (2013) emphasizes that discourse is not only a means of communication but also a form of social practice that sustains power relations and cultural norms. From this perspective, advertisements are not simply persuasive messages; they are discursive practices through which corporations promote particular values and position consumers in specific roles. Semiotics explains what the signs and symbols in Nigerian telecommunication advertisements mean and how they draw on shared cultural knowledge and emotional experience. CDA then explains why these meanings matter by revealing how they support certain ideologies, shape consumer identities, and reinforce broader socio-economic assumptions. By analysing the adverts through both lenses, the study is able to show not only how meaning is constructed, but also how it operates ideologically to influence consumer perception, loyalty, and social understanding in subtle yet powerful ways.

Research Questions

1. How do Nigerian telecommunication advertisements use language and visual imagery to construct meanings of connectivity?
2. What cultural codes, symbolic representations and emotional appeals are expressed through the Nigerian telecommunication advertisements?
3. In what ways do the semiotic and discursive strategies shape consumer identity, promote brand loyalty and reinforce ideological values in Nigerian telecommunication advertisements?

Methodology

This study is grounded in an integrated semiotic and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. It draws primarily on Barthes' (1972) theory of signification, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar, and Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of discourse, with additional insight from van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive approach. Together, these theories form a coherent analytical tradition for examining advertising both as a multimodal cultural text and as an ideological discourse. Semiotics provides the tools for identifying and interpreting linguistic, visual and auditory signs and for explaining how meaning is constructed through processes of denotation, connotation and myth. CDA extends this analysis by examining how these meanings operate within social contexts, revealing how they shape identities, reproduce ideologies and serve institutional and corporate interests. The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design which is well suited to the analysis of symbolic and ideological meanings in media texts. Qualitative research prioritizes depth of understanding rather than numerical generalization and is particularly appropriate for examining advertising as a cultural artefact. As Flick (2018) notes, cultural texts such as advertisements encode values, emotions and belief systems that are best explored

through interpretive methods rather than quantitative measurement. The adverts were sourced from official YouTube channels and verified digital archives to ensure authenticity and public circulation. They were chosen because they foreground themes such as identity, resilience, ambition, family and national unity, which are central to contemporary Nigerian advertising discourse. The selected advertisements are: MTN: *We Move* (2021) and *Go Make a Difference* (2024), Airtel: *Live Limitless* (2024) and *Esther* (2022), Glo: *Data is Oxygen* (2023) and *One Language* (2022), 9mobile: *Echoes* (2025) and *Take Bold Steps* (2023). Each advertisement was viewed repeatedly and carefully transcribed. The data were then organised into three analytical categories: linguistic, visual, and auditory elements. Linguistic data included slogans, taglines, dialogue, narrative voice, and patterns of code-switching. Visual data covered colour schemes, camera angles, gestures, facial expressions, settings, clothing, and the use of national or cultural symbols. Auditory data comprised background music, rhythm, tone, sound effects, and voice quality. This systematic categorization ensured that meaning-making across different semiotic modes was captured comprehensively and prepared the data for layered analysis. Ethical standards were carefully observed throughout the study. All analyzed advertisements are publicly available and this provided an eliminating concern related to consent or privacy. Sources were properly acknowledged, and cultural, ethnic and gender representations were interpreted with care to avoid misrepresentation or bias. This methodological approach is considered appropriate because it allows Nigerian telecommunication advertisements to be examined simultaneously as cultural texts and ideological instruments.

Results

This section presents and discusses the analysis of selected Nigerian telecommunication advertisements in relation to the study's three research questions. The data consist of eight advertisements produced by MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile. These adverts were purposively selected because of their rich and deliberate use of language, colour, music, gesture and visual imagery to construct meanings that are both emotionally engaging and culturally familiar to Nigerian audiences.

Research Question 1. How do Nigerian telecommunication advertisements use language and visual imagery to construct meanings of connectivity?

The analysis below is guided by the research question above to show how language and visual imagery work together to produce layered meanings that position connectivity as essential to everyday life, social belonging and personal progress within the Nigerian context.

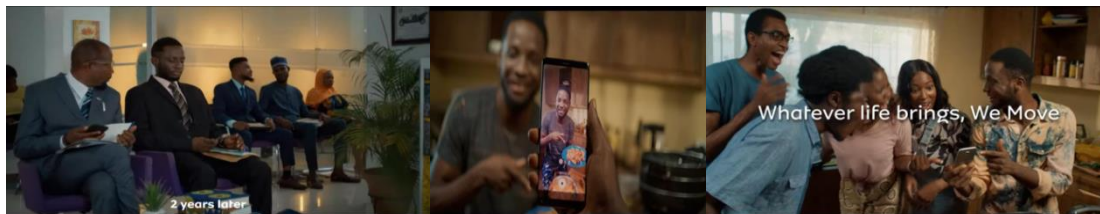


Fig 1: Screenshot by the researcher from MTN YouTube Channel, retrieved 2025.

Applying Barthes, (1972) **denotative level**, the *We Move* advert depicts ordinary scenes of Nigerians students, market traders, commercial riders and artisans who are engaged in routine activities within familiar urban and semi-urban settings. Linguistically, the slogan "*We Move*" draws directly from Nigerian street parlance that is commonly used to express persistence in the face of difficulty. At the **connotative level**, the common everyday expression acquires deeper cultural significance. "*We Move*" connotes collective resilience, adaptability and an unyielding spirit. Visually, the persistent use of MTN's touch of yellow colour suggests energy, optimism and continuity, while

dynamic camera movements and images of physical motion reinforce notions of progress and forward momentum. In terms of Kress & van Leeuwen, (2006) visual grammar, the emphasis on movement and frontal angles present viewers as participants in the narrative rather than detached observers. This encourages emotional identification with the subjects on screen. At the mythic level, the linguistic and visual signs merge to accommodate the idea of resilience as an inherent Nigerian trait. Hardship is reframed not as a structural or systemic issue but as a normal condition that is overcome through determination. In Barthesian terms, resilience becomes a cultural myth which is an undisputed national identity rather than a historically produced response to socio-economic realities. From the CDA perspective, the myth performs important ideological work. Drawing on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, the advert can be read as a discursive practice that appropriates a popular cultural expression and recontextualises it within corporate discourse. The socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk (2008) further reveals the essence of the repeated association between endurance and MTN to implant a shared mental model in which progress is imagined as an individual or collective attitude supported by corporate connectivity. Consequently, the advert subtly shifts attention away from broader structural challenges and reframes survival and perseverance as personal virtues and strategically positions MTN as a symbolic enabler of that resilience. Through the integrated use of language and imagery, *We Move* advert constructs meaning by aligning national identity, emotional endurance and brand loyalty by presenting MTN not merely as a telecom provider but as a companion in everyday struggle and hope.

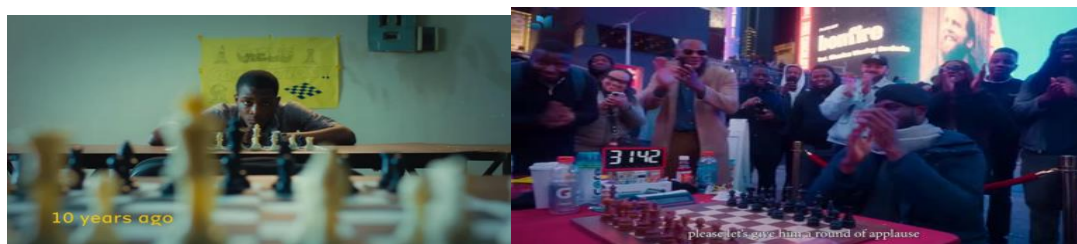


Fig 2: Screenshot by the researcher from MTN YouTube Channel, retrieved 2024

The *Go Make a Difference* advertisement presents a strategic integration of semiotic resources with a stronger emphasis on empowerment and agency. At the **denotative level**, the advert portrays Nigerians engaged in mentorship, creative work, innovation and community development. The slogan employs an imperative sentence structure "*Go Make a Difference*" to directly address the viewer and demands action. At the **connotative level**, the use of imperative sentence structure conveys motivation, confidence and self-belief. The visual scope characterized by warm colours, natural lighting and close interpersonal interactions connotes sincerity, community and moral purpose. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar situates the use of close shots and eye-level angles as a means of reduction of social distance and an instrument of encouraging viewers to see themselves as capable agents of change. At the **mythic level**, the advert creates a powerful cultural narrative about the belief that individual initiative is the primary pathway to national development. In Barthesian terms, personal effort is elevated into a cultural myth that obscures the role of institutions and structural inequalities in shaping social outcomes. CDA intensifies this interpretation by revealing the ideological implications of such representation. Within Fairclough's (1995) framework, the advert transforms civic ideals in form of service, mentorship and community building to leverage into market-aligned values. Van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive lens highlights the usefulness of repeated exposure to this form of discourse and how the discourse modifies a **neoliberal ideology** in which responsibility for social progress is relocated from the state to the individual. MTN is discursively positioned as the facilitator of this self-driven success as it beef up a consumer identity rooted in ambition, productivity and self-reliance. Through the interplay of imperative language, emotive imagery and cultural symbolism, *Go Make a Difference* advert builds a meaning that resonates emotionally while advancing a market-oriented vision of empowerment. The advert functions simultaneously as a motivational narrative and an ideological text that match personal aspiration with

brand affiliation. Across both adverts, meaning is not produced by language or visuals alone but through their systematic interaction. Semiotic analysis reveals how familiar expressions, colours, and images generate culturally resonant meanings, while CDA explains how these meanings are mobilised to promote ideologies of resilience, empowerment, and consumer responsibility. Together, these analytical layers demonstrate how MTN's advertising discourse constructs Nigerian identity in emotionally appealing yet ideologically consequential ways, reinforcing brand loyalty while shaping how audiences understand themselves and their social roles.



Fig 3: Screenshot by the researcher from Airtel YouTube Channel, retrieved 2024

Airtel Nigeria's *Live Limitless* advertisement spotlights themes of resilience, cultural pride and self-affirmation through the representation of Farooq Oreagba, who appears dressed in Yoruba traditional attire. At the denotative level and in line with Barthes' (1972) framework, the advertisement presents Oreagba walking confidently through a festive crowd. This surface-level depiction establishes the basic visual narrative posture of confidence in cultural pride. Oreagba's assured posture, traditional clothing and the juxtaposition of cultural symbols with modern urban elements communicate ideas of strength, pride and continuity values between tradition and modern life at the connotative level. These visual choices suggest that personal ambition can coexist with cultural rootedness. The advertisement constructs Airtel as a brand that enables individuals to transcend limitations at the mythic level, and it symbolically links cultural identity to the idea of limitless potential. The recurring symbols of attire, movement and colour function serve as signifiers of ambition grounded in heritage from a semiotic perspective. Examined through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008), the advertisement presents Oreagba's personal narrative of endurance and survival and integrates it into Airtel's corporate identity. In doing this, Airtel draws on laid down cultural and social responsibilities to accentuate its brand image. As noted by Wodak and Meyer (2016), such discursive strategies allow corporations to actualise cultural meaning and symbolic power. The advertisement, therefore, constructs meaning by aligning individual resilience with corporate values and positions Airtel as a mediator between tradition and progress.



Fig 4: Screenshot by the researcher from Airtel Ads of the World, 2022.

The *Esther* advertisement captures the emotionally charged experience of a daughter who becomes distressed when her mother fails to respond to repeated phone calls. At the denotative level, the narrative depicts an everyday family

situation that is immediately recognizable to viewers. This simplicity grounds the advertisement in ordinary lived experience. The use of subdued lighting, prolonged silence, and intimate close-up shots is suggestive of feelings of love, concern, anxiety and, particularly the fear associated with potential loss. These aesthetic choices heighten the emotional atmosphere of the narrative. The advertisement advances the idea that communication is essential for emotional security and familial closeness at the mythic level. Airtel is positioned, in this advert, as the invisible yet vital link that sustains these relationships. Semiotic analysis shows the interplay of visual imagery, voice and silence role to produce bedded emotional meaning (Sutiah, 2021). From a CDA analytical perspective, the advertisement reframes emotional connection as a product value which subtly suggests that love, safety and reassurance are facilitated through Airtel's network. This reflects a broader advertising practice in which corporate influence over personal emotions is naturalised and normalised. The combination of understated storytelling with strong emotional appeal and symbolic imagery presents the *Esther* advertisement constructs and depicts Airtel as more than a telecommunications provider. Instead, the brand is represented as an essential emotional conduit that supports love, care and family bonds.



Fig 5: Screenshot by the researcher from Glo YouTube Channel, 2023.

Glo advertisement of *Data is Oxygen* illustrates internet connectivity as a fundamental requirement for everyday life. The slogan itself functions as a central metaphor which equates mobile data with oxygen and, by extension, with human survival. At the denotative level, in line with Barthes' (1972) model, the advertisement depicts individuals experiencing anxiety and helplessness when their data connection is disrupted. Visible relief and renewed activity only come to the surface once connectivity is restored. The use of heartbeat imagery, rhythmic sound patterns and dominant blue and green colour tones conveys meanings associated with life, renewal and stability. These sensory elements support the idea that digital connection sustains modern existence. at the connotative level. Glo is constructed as a source of vitality and continuity at fantasy realm. The aim is to promote the belief that digital connectivity is as essential as breathing itself. Semiotic analysis looks at the strategic deployment of metaphor, sound and colour as producers of a strong emotional response that links network access with survival. The critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008) note that advertisement advances a deeper ideological message by transforming a commercial service into a naturalised human necessity. As Modu and Bwala (2023) observe, Nigerian advertising frequently channels social anxieties through persuasive narratives. In this case, disconnection is symbolically equated with suffocation. From the analysis above, Glo constructs meaning by positioning itself not merely as a telecommunications provider, but as a vital lifeline within an increasingly digital society.

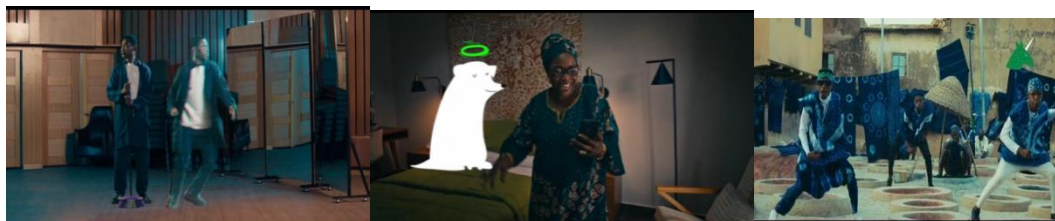


Fig 6: Screenshot by the researcher from Glo Ads of the World , 2022.

Glo *One Language* advertisement employs dance, music and vibrant visual imagery to foreground the theme of unity within cultural diversity. At the denotative level, the advert presents Nigerians from different ethnic backgrounds engaging in collective dance performances. This straightforward depiction establishes a shared social space grounded in cultural expression. At the connotative level of interpretation, the energetic rhythms, coordinated movements and colourful aesthetics typify joy, harmony and social cohesion. These elements suggest that difference does not hinder connection but can, as an alternative, foster collective celebration. At the mythic level, Glo is represented as a unifying force that transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries, enabling shared identity and belonging. Semiotic analysis points out that, traditional costumes, bodily movement and music operate as visual and auditory signs of cultural harmony. From a critical discourse analytical perspective, the advertisement appropriates the idea of national unity and aligns it with the brand's identity. This implies that collective connection is facilitated through Glo's network. As noted by Dalamu and Ogunlusi (2020), Nigerian advertisements frequently draw on shared cultural values to build credibility and persuasive appeal. Glo advertisement functionally constructs meaning by transforming widely recognised cultural symbols of unity and joy into elements of brand identity. It positions itself as the network that communicates a shared "language" of connection and belonging.

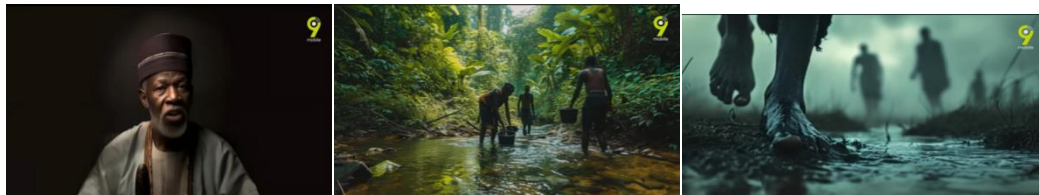


Fig 7: Screenshot by the researcher from 9mobile YouTube Channel , 2025

9mobile Nigeria's *Echoes* campaign explores themes of memory, absence and emotional connection through the central motif of voice. At the linguistic level, expressions such as "I miss you" function as emotionally charged utterances that evoke feelings of longing and attachment. Visually, the advertisement relies on dim lighting and sparsely occupied spaces to signify separation and emotional distance. At the denotative level and from the viewpoint of Barthes' (1972) framework, the advert depicts individuals who are physically separated from their loved ones. The connotative level interpretation also presents careful interplay of sound, silence and restrained visual movement to communicate emotional closeness that endures despite physical absence. At the mythic level, 9mobile is constructed as a custodian of memory which presents the brand as a medium through which emotional bonds are preserved and sustained by technology. Semiotic perspective looks at the strategic use of tone, pauses and visual stillness as a demonstration of how silence can function as a powerful communicative resource alongside spoken language. When examined through a critical discourse analytical lens (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008), the advertisement converts nostalgia into a consumable experience by implying that emotional continuity and remembrance are dependent on access to the network. Ogbonna (2022) notes that Nigerian advertising frequently draws on themes of absence and reunion to generate empathy and deepen brand attachment. In this context, 9mobile *Echoes* constructs meaning which goes beyond its function of just a telecommunication provider but also as a symbolic bridge between distance and emotional connection.



Fig 8: Screenshot by the researcher from 9mobile YouTube Channel , 2023.

9mobile Nigeria *Take Bold Steps* campaign highlights youth empowerment, ambition and personal initiative. The use of imperatives such as “Start today” and “Take bold steps” operate as motivational cues that encourage action and self-belief. At the denotative level, the advertisement portrays young Nigerians actively pursuing their aspirations in areas such as technology, fashion and education. At the connotative level, the use of bright lighting, forward-facing movement and open visual spaces symbolises hope, growth and courage. These elements collectively suggest progress and possibility. At the mythic level, 9mobile positions itself as a supportive companion that enables ambition and inspires forward momentum. Through semiotic analysis, recurring symbols such as footsteps, sunrise imagery and expansive environments function as signs of movement, transition and new beginnings. The critical discourse analytical perspective of (Fairclough, 2013) notes that some aspects of advertisement frame ambition primarily as an individual responsibility thereby reflecting neoliberal ideologies that associate success with personal effort rather than collective or structural support. Faizan (2020) also observes that many African advertisements embed youthful aspirations within brand narratives to foster emotional resonance and identification. Within the framework noted above, *Take Bold Steps* creates meaning by combining motivational language with uplifting visuals. This shows that 9mobile is a brand that aligns with dreamers, achievers and future-oriented youth.

RQ 2. How do Nigerian telecommunication advertisements use cultural symbols and emotional appeals to persuade audiences?

The analysis of advertisements produced by MTN, Airtel, and 9mobile demonstrates that cultural codes and emotional appeals operate on two interconnected levels. First, they function as multimodal cultural texts that draw meaning from everyday Nigerian social realities. Second, they operate as ideological discourses that advance corporate interests. This dual function accounts for much of the persuasive power of Nigerian telecommunication advertising and directly addresses the study’s second research question (RQ 2). From the multimodal cultural context, these advertisements derive their meaning from shared cultural knowledge, collective memory and lived experience. They combine language, visual imagery, music, silence, gesture and narrative structure to create familiarity and emotional resonance. The analysed adverts present recurring cultural codes such as resilience, hustle, ubuntu, family closeness, cultural pride, memory, migration, ambition and unity which anchored brand messages within identifiable aspects of Nigerian life. For instance, MTN’s *We Move* adapts post-#EndSARS youth slang into both visual and linguistic expressions of collective endurance and perseverance. Similarly, *Go Make a Difference* encodes the principle of togetherness through scenes of cooperation, mentorship and shared responsibility. Airtel’s *Live Limitless* draws heavily on Yoruba cultural symbols, including agbada, beads and horsemanship. *Esther* relies on domestic spaces, use of Pidgin English, silence and close-up shots to evoke family intimacy and care. In the case of 9mobile, *Echoes* employs voice notes, photographs and empty spaces to communicate themes of memory, absence and diaspora, whereas *Take Bold Steps* uses rapid movement, bright lighting, and motivational language to reflect youth ambition and the hustle ethos.

Through these multimodal strategies, the advertisements function as cultural mirrors. Their narratives appear authentic because they are grounded in familiar values and emotional experiences, allowing brand messages to blend seamlessly into everyday Nigerian life. Barthes’ (1972) theory of signification opines that what looks natural or

normal is often cultural and ideological and that meaning is not fixed but media, advertisements and texts shape how we think. The cultural codes are, sometimes, elevated beyond their specific social contexts and presented as natural and self-evident truths. In the the contexts of the advertisements, resilience is framed as an inherent Nigerian quality rather than a response to economic or political hardship. Family love is portrayed as inseparable from constant connectivity, while ambition is constructed as a moral duty. Unity, in turn, appears effortless and achievable through technological mediation. Emotion plays a central role in sustaining these myths. Feelings of pride, nostalgia, love, hope, fear and inspiration are carefully produced through sound design, silence, lighting, movement and narrative pacing. Rather than merely strengthening the message, these emotional cues obscure its constructed nature and make corporate claims appear obvious and unquestionable. In this way, telecommunication services are mythologized as natural companions to survival, belonging, memory and success. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, we see the same cultural and emotional resources also operate ideologically. While the advertisements appear to celebrate shared social values, they, at the same time, reframe those values within corporate and commercial principle. MTN's emphasis on resilience, for example, presents socio-economic hardship as a matter of individual endurance by subtly diverting attention from structural inequalities. The discourse of resilience and determination in *Go Make a Difference* is rearticulated as branded empowerment that aligns communal responsibility with corporate identity. Airtel's family-centred narratives imply that emotional security and care depend on network reliability, thereby promoting common intimacy. In *Live Limitless*, cultural pride is interpreted to permit corporate ambition and prestige. Similarly, 9mobile's *Echoes* transforms memory and nostalgia into consumable experiences, while *Take Bold Steps* promotes neoliberal philosophical doctrine by framing ambition primarily as an individual responsibility rather than a socially conditioned process. These advertisements present emotional appeals that encourage audiences to recognise themselves within the brand narratives of resilient citizens, devoted family members, ambitious youth or proud Nigerians. Critical Discourse Analysis perspective reveals that this process of identification is not neutral. It aligns personal identity with corporate consumption and effectively transform cultural belonging into brand loyalty. The analysis shows that cultural codes and emotional appeals serve a clear ideological function by normalising the presence of telecommunication brands within social and emotional life. Connectivity is framed as essential to resilience and collective progress in MTN's narratives, as integral to cultural pride and family love in Airtel's campaigns and central to memory and ambition in 9mobile's advertising. As a result, these brands are positioned not merely as service providers, but as emotional and social infrastructures within Nigerian society. Nigerian telecommunication advertisements, therefore, deploy cultural codes and emotional appeals in ways that allow them to function simultaneously as multimodal cultural texts and ideological discourses. As cultural texts, they derive authenticity from shared values and lived experiences. As ideological discourses, they appropriate these values to advance corporate interests, shape self-understanding and cultivate consumer loyalty. Through the processes of myth-making and discursive framing accessed through semiotic and critical discourse analysis, qualities such as resilience, unity, family love, memory and ambition are transformed into naturalised brand attributes which integrate telecommunication networks deeply within the cultural and emotional imagination of Nigerian audiences.

RQ 3. How do language and visuals in Nigerian telecommunication adverts influence the ways consumers perceive themselves and develop loyalty to a brand?

The advertisements of MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile analysed in this study present a clear and consistent pattern. Through the strategic use of language, visual imagery, music and culturally familiar symbols, these brands move beyond the promotion of telecommunication services. Instead, the advertisements function as cultural texts that actively shape how Nigerians understand themselves, their social values and their relationship with telecommunication companies. In this context, advertising becomes a key site where consumer identity and brand loyalty are produced and improved. Drawing on Barthes' (1972) concept of myth, the advertisements repeatedly frame shared social values such as resilience, ambition, family bonds, unity and cultural pride as natural and accepted elements of Nigerian identity. MTN's *We Move* and *Go Make a Difference* position hustling, endurance, and social responsibility as defining characteristics of what it means to be Nigerian. Similarly, Airtel's *Live*

Limitless and *Esther* present cultural dignity and family intimacy as central identity markers. In related ways, campaigns by Glo and 9mobile portray connectivity, unity, memory and ambition as essential components of everyday life. The use of repetition and emotionally charged narratives make these values to gradually lose their appearance as socially constructed ideas and instead come to be perceived as common national and social values. Viewers are encouraged to see themselves not simply as network subscribers, but as resilient citizens, agents of change, cultural custodians and emotionally connected family members. Consumer identity is, therefore, shaped subtly, through the use of familiar symbols, local languages, Nigerian Pidgin and recognizable social situations rather than overt or direct persuasion. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, particularly within Fairclough's framework, these semiotic strategies also perform important ideological functions. Telecommunication companies are represented not merely as commercial entities, but as cultural partners, social enablers, and emotional companions within everyday life. MTN aligns itself with narratives of national endurance and empowerment, Airtel with cultural authenticity and family care, Glo with survival and national cohesion, and 9mobile with emotional continuity and personal courage. This form of ideological positioning allows brands to appropriate widely shared communal and national values and implant themselves within consumers' sense of social belonging. By aligning brand narratives with aspirations such as progress, dignity, unity and hope, the advertisements change the boundary between corporate interests and lived experience and make the presence of the brand appear natural, supportive and necessary.

Within these advertisements, brand loyalty is constructed less through rational argument and more through emotional and identity-based engagement. Family-oriented storytelling in Airtel's campaigns, themes of distance and memory in 9mobile's adverts, and MTN's portrayals of collective struggle all work to generate intimacy, trust, and emotional recognition. Through these narratives, the brands position themselves as attentive to the emotional realities of their audiences. Brand loyalty is further strengthened through aspiration. Campaigns such as *Take Bold Steps*, *Live Limitless*, and *Go Make a Difference* invite viewers to imagine their desired futures in alignment with the brand. Remaining loyal to a particular network therefore becomes a form of self-affirmation, allowing consumers to express their values, ambitions, and sense of cultural or national identity through continued brand affiliation. The analysis demonstrates that Nigerian telecommunication advertising operates as a powerful semiotic system through which cultural meaning, emotional attachment and consumer identity are continuously constructed and reinforced. By drawing on familiar cultural codes which range from language varieties and traditional attire to music, family structures and shared social experiences. These advertisements transform connectivity from a purely technical service into a symbolic resource associated with resilience, care, ambition and national belonging. In consonance with Williamson's (1978) argument that advertising endows ordinary commodities with cultural value, the campaigns examined reveal how telecom brands embed themselves seamlessly within the rhythms of everyday Nigerian life. Through the lens of Barthes' notion of myth and Hall's encoding/decoding model, it becomes evident that audiences are not merely sold products; rather, they are invited to recognize themselves within carefully constructed narratives of hope, perseverance and progress to foster deeper emotional identification with the brands.

At the same time, the analysis raises critical reflections regarding the ideological work performed by these narratives. While the advertisements resonate strongly because they reflect tangible social realities—economic struggle, migration, family bonds, and aspirations for upward mobility—they also risk oversimplifying complex structural challenges by emphasizing individual effort and emotional endurance. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this underscores how telecom brands position themselves as cultural authorities, shaping dominant ways of thinking about success, responsibility, and survival in contemporary Nigeria. Although such representations cultivate strong emotional, symbolic, and practical loyalty, they may obscure systemic inequalities by framing connectivity and personal determination as sufficient solutions. Nevertheless, the overall impact of these adverts highlights their significance as cultural texts that actively influence how Nigerians understand identity, belonging, and the role of communication in modern social life. Overall, this analysis establishes that Nigerian telecommunication advertisements operate not only as commercial messages but as influential cultural texts that shape identity, emotion, and everyday meaning. By revealing how semiotic practices and ideological discourses

work together to normalize corporate presence within social life, the analysis highlights both the persuasive power and the cultural consequences of these adverts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examines how Nigerian telecommunication advertisements deploy semiotic resources to construct meaning, shape consumer identity and foster brand loyalty within specific socio-cultural contexts. The analysis of adverts from MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile demonstrates that these objectives have been fully addressed. First, by applying Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, the study shows how ordinary cultural signs such as local idioms, dress styles, music, family interactions and gestures are transformed into naturalized "truths" about resilience, unity, ambition and success. Second, through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the study reveals how these multimodal choices are integrated within broader ideological frameworks to promote particular views of identity, responsibility and progress. In doing so, the research confirms that Nigerian telecommunication advertising functions not merely as commercial communication but as a powerful cultural and political discourse that shapes how connectivity, citizenship and belonging are understood. The findings further demonstrate that each brand constructs a distinct yet overlapping consumer identity aligned with its corporate positioning. MTN frames consumers as resilient and socially engaged citizens; Airtel foregrounds family, care, and cultural pride; Glo emphasizes survival, unity, and indispensability; and 9mobile highlights emotional continuity, ambition, and self-development. Collectively, these representations fulfil the study's objective of showing how connectivity is discursively elevated from a technical service to a core element of social life in Nigeria. However, a critical reflection reveals certain limitations. The study focuses primarily on textual and visual analysis of selected adverts and does not incorporate audience reception data, which limits insight into how meanings are accepted, negotiated, or resisted in everyday contexts. In addition, while the analysis highlights ideological patterns, it does not quantitatively assess their impact on consumer behavior. Acknowledging these limitations strengthens the academic credibility of the study and opens avenues for further research. Despite these constraints, the study makes a significant scholarly contribution by extending Critical Discourse Analysis and semiotic theory into the domain of Nigerian advertising as a form of political and cultural discourse. It demonstrates how corporate advertising participates in the circulation of neoliberal and nationalist ideologies to subtly shape public understanding of responsibility, progress and social belonging. By situating telecommunication adverts within broader debates on discourse, power and identity. The research advances understanding of how non-traditional political texts, such as commercial advertisements, function as influential sites of meaning-making in Nigeria. Accordingly, it is recommended that advertisers continue to draw on Nigeria's rich cultural resources with greater ethical sensitivity by avoiding stereotypes and excessive emotional manipulation. Efforts should also focus on aligning symbolic narratives with tangible improvements in accessibility and affordability. Future research should prioritise audience reception studies to provide a more comprehensive account of how advertising discourse is interpreted and lived. The applications of recommendations above will further enrich CDA scholarship in the Nigerian context.

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