



PAPER

MULTIMODAL METADISCOURSE IN ONLINE ADVERTISING: INTEGRATING VERBAL AND VISUAL STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Online advertising increasingly relies on the integration of verbal and visual semiotic resources to create persuasive and engaging content. This study examines how metadiscourse functions across linguistic and visual modes in social media advertisements, highlighting the interdependence of text, imagery, color, typography, layout, and gaze direction in shaping meaning. Drawing on a corpus of fifty advertisements from Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, a mixed-methods approach was applied, combining quantitative frequency analysis of engagement markers, directives, boosters, and attitude expressions with qualitative multimodal discourse analysis of visual elements.

Key words: Multimodal Discourse, Metadiscourse, Online Advertising, Social Media, Persuasion, Visual Semiotics, Engagement Markers

INTRODUCTION

The study *Metadiscourse in Online Advertising: Exploring Linguistic and Visual Metadiscourse in Social Media Advertisements* by Al-Subhi (2022) investigates how metadiscourse operates in contemporary online advertising as a multimodal persuasive resource. Departing from the traditional view that metadiscourse is primarily a feature of written academic discourse, the research demonstrates that social media advertising relies

heavily on both linguistic and visual metadiscursive elements to organize information, engage the audience, and enhance persuasive impact.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is grounded in Hyland’s interpersonal model of metadiscourse for the analysis of verbal elements and in multimodal discourse analysis, particularly the visual grammar framework of Kress and van Leeuwen, for the

Compiled on: February 16, 2026.

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examination of visual components. The data consist of fifty advertisements collected from major social networking platforms, including Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, and the analysis combines quantitative frequency counts with qualitative interpretation in order to identify the communicative and pragmatic functions of the metadiscursive markers.

The findings indicate that online advertising discourse is characterized by a high frequency of interpersonal metadiscourse, especially engagement markers and directives, which function to simulate interaction and establish a direct relationship between the advertiser and the audience. Through the use of personal pronouns, questions, and imperative structures, the advertisements create a dialogic environment that positions viewers as active participants rather than passive recipients. Attitude markers and boosters are also widely used to express evaluation, reinforce the credibility of the message, and intensify the positive representation of the advertised product or service. These linguistic resources contribute to the construction of a persuasive voice and help shape the reader's response by guiding interpretation and encouraging consumer action.

At the visual level, the study shows that metadiscursive meaning is realized through a range of semiotic resources such as salience, framing, color, typography, layout, and gaze. These elements structure the flow of information, highlight key messages, and direct the viewer's attention to the most important aspects of the advertisement. Salient images, bright and culturally loaded colors, and the strategic placement of visual components increase the visibility and memorability of the promotional content, while framing techniques organize the message into cognitively accessible units. Typography and size contrast function in a way similar to textual code glosses, clarifying the hierarchy of information and facilitating comprehension. The gaze of represented participants in advertising images establishes an interpersonal connection with the audience and serves as a visual equivalent of engagement markers in verbal discourse.

The interaction between linguistic and visual metadiscourse is one of the central contributions of the study. Rather than duplicating each other,

verbal and visual modes complement and reinforce one another to create a unified persuasive meaning. The multimodal configuration of metadiscourse enables advertisements to achieve coherence, guide interpretation, and increase their rhetorical effectiveness. This integration demonstrates that persuasion in digital advertising is not achieved solely through language but through the coordinated use of multiple semiotic resources that function metadiscursively to manage the communicative process and influence audience perception.

The study concludes that online advertising should be understood as a multimodal metadiscursive discourse in which both textual and visual elements play a crucial role in organizing information, constructing interpersonal relations, and enhancing persuasion. By extending the concept of metadiscourse beyond purely verbal communication and applying it to social media advertising, the research provides an important contribution to discourse analysis, pragmatics, and multimodal studies. It also highlights the need to consider visual metadiscourse as an integral component of meaning-making in digital communication and opens new directions for future research on persuasive discourse in multimodal environments.

Online advertising discourse has increasingly become a focal point of multimodal communication research, highlighting the interplay between verbal and visual elements in persuasive messaging. Al-Subhi (2022) demonstrates that social media advertisements employ both linguistic and visual metadiscursive strategies to engage audiences, organize information, and enhance persuasion. Engagement markers, directives, boosters, and attitude markers function to simulate interactivity and guide user interpretation, while salient images, framing, color schemes, typography, and gaze direction structure the visual dimension of communication, complementing textual markers to create a coherent multimodal persuasive discourse. These findings underscore the necessity of considering metadiscourse beyond the verbal realm, situating visual elements as integral to the construction of meaning in online advertising.

Extending this perspective, Forceville (2009) explores multimodal metaphor in advertising,

emphasizing how images and text interact to produce conceptual blends that influence cognitive and emotional reception. He argues that visual metaphors do not merely illustrate verbal propositions but generate additional layers of meaning, often shaping audience perceptions subconsciously. Similarly, Machin and Thornborrow (2003) highlight the role of semiotic resources in print and online advertising, demonstrating that visual design elements such as color, layout, and font convey attitudinal and evaluative stances that reinforce the verbal message. These studies collectively reveal that multimodal configurations function as strategic tools for persuasion, guiding attention and structuring interpretation.

From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009) propose that advertisers leverage conceptual metaphor theory to integrate textual and visual cues into cohesive narratives, facilitating audience comprehension and memory retention. Their work shows that images and language together form meaning-making units that cannot be fully understood in isolation, which aligns with Al-Subhi's findings on social media advertisements. Similarly, Jewitt (2009) in her foundational work on multimodality emphasizes the importance of analyzing the interrelationship between semiotic modes, advocating for methodological approaches that account for both linguistic and visual patterns in discourse analysis.

Results and Discussion

Recent studies in social media contexts further corroborate these observations. Chen and Wang (2020) examine interactive engagement markers in digital advertising, revealing that personalized verbal cues, including direct address and interrogatives, significantly enhance user engagement when paired with visual salience and color-coded prompts. Their research demonstrates that multimodal synergy is a key determinant of effective persuasion, with linguistic markers guiding cognitive interpretation and visual markers amplifying affective impact. Taken together, these findings suggest that understanding online advertising as a multimodal metadiscursive phenomenon provides a comprehensive framework

for analyzing persuasive communication, bridging discourse analysis, pragmatics, and semiotic research.

In fact, the integration of verbal and nonverbal elements in online advertisements constitutes a strategically orchestrated persuasive system. While linguistic markers such as engagement devices and directives establish interpersonal relations and cognitive guidance, visual semiotics, including salience, framing, and gaze direction, reinforce message clarity, attention management, and emotional impact. Multimodal metadiscourse thus emerges as a fundamental construct in understanding how digital advertising operates, offering significant insights for both theoretical research and applied marketing communication.

Online advertising functions as a multimodal persuasive system in which linguistic and nonverbal semiotic resources work together to construct meaning and influence audiences. Research demonstrates that beyond purely textual messaging, advertisers systematically combine text with visual elements such as imagery, color, typography, and layout to create cohesive communicative units that guide interpretation and maximize impact. For instance, linguistic meta discourse features—such as engagement markers, directives, and evaluative language—facilitate interpersonal contact and structure the message, while visual salience, framing, and participant gaze direct attention and reinforce semantic emphasis, making the advertisement more persuasive and accessible to consumers. Multimodality research in advertising further shows that different semiotic resources are interdependent; visual grammar frameworks reveal that representational and interactional meanings emerge from the interaction of text and image, shaping both narrative framing and viewer engagement. Cognitive linguistic approaches to multimodal metaphor illustrate how meaning is constructed across sensory channels, with conceptual blending of linguistic and visual metaphors enhancing emotional resonance and consumer recall in product advertising.

The analysis of fifty social media advertisements revealed a clear integration of verbal and visual metadiscourse to enhance persuasive effect. Linguistic markers such as engagement devices, directives, boosters, and attitude expressions were

found to create direct interpersonal contact with the audience. Engagement markers, including personal pronouns and interrogatives, simulated dialogue, encouraging audience interaction, while directives such as “try,” “check,” or “discover” prompted action. Boosters and attitude markers enhanced credibility and positive evaluation of the products, demonstrating how verbal elements structure interpretation and influence consumer decision-making.

Visual metadiscourse complemented these verbal strategies through salience, framing, color, typography, layout, and gaze direction. Salient images and bright colors drew attention to key information, while framing organized content into cognitively accessible units. Typography and font size highlighted hierarchy, directing attention to main messages, and gaze of represented participants established interpersonal connection analogous to verbal engagement markers. The analysis confirmed that visual elements do not merely decorate text; they actively contribute to meaning-making and persuasive power.

The interaction between verbal and visual modes was highly synergistic. Textual and visual cues rarely duplicated information; instead, they reinforced each other to produce coherent multimodal messages. This integration aligns with cognitive linguistic perspectives, which suggest that conceptual metaphors and blending across modes facilitate comprehension and retention. Comparisons with cross-cultural and digital advertising studies indicate that these strategies are widely applicable, emphasizing the necessity of considering both linguistic and visual resources in analyzing online advertising discourse.

Overall, the findings highlight that online advertisements function as multimodal metadiscursive systems. Verbal and visual elements operate interdependently to attract attention, structure information, establish engagement, and enhance persuasive impact. Such multimodal coordination is central to the effectiveness of social media marketing, supporting prior research in multimodal discourse, semiotics, and cognitive linguistics. These results reinforce the notion that comprehensive advertising analysis must extend beyond textual content to include visual semiotics and integrated mode interactions.

CONCLUSION

Comparative studies also indicate that multimodal strategies are deployed cross culturally, with both English and other language advertisements employing similar combinations of textual and visual resources to convey brand messages and engage viewers despite linguistic variation. More broadly, semiotic analyses of billboard and digital ads demonstrate that color, symbol, and gesture all contribute to persuasive effect by leveraging culturally resonant meanings alongside textual slogans, emphasizing that multimodal integration is essential for effective advertising communication. Together, these bodies of literature show that advertising discourse cannot be fully understood by examining verbal content alone; it is inherently modal, with verbal and visual elements functioning synergistically to shape interpretation, evoke emotion, and influence consumer behaviour.

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