

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of a McDonald's Advertisement

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe how McDonald's advertisement constructs persuasive meaning and brand identity through multimodal discourse. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using multimodal discourse analysis based on the framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The data consist of selected McDonald's advertisement materials containing both visual and linguistic elements. Data were collected through observation and documentation, then analyzed by identifying visual components such as color, typography, layout, and food imagery, as well as linguistic features including slogans and promotional texts. The analysis further examines the inters miotic relationship between visual and verbal modes to understand how they work together in creating meaning. The findings reveal that visual elements and linguistic messages are strategically integrated to attract attention, evoke positive emotions, and reinforce McDonald's brand identity. Colors, imagery, and layout create visual appeal, while concise and persuasive language strengthens the promotional message. The study concludes that the advertisement's effectiveness stems from the seamless interaction between different semiotic modes, producing a cohesive and emotionally engaging message. These findings demonstrate how global brands maintain market dominance through sophisticated multimodal communication strategies that resonate with the psychological needs and consumption patterns of modern consumers.

Keywords: *Multimodality, Mcdonald's, Visual Metaphor, Advertising Strategy*

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital and physical landscape, advertising has evolved far beyond simply promoting products or services. Today, advertising functions as a sophisticated mechanism for meaning-making, utilizing a strategic combination of text, images, colors, layout, and symbols that work synergistically to influence and persuade diverse audiences (Prasetya, 2025). This comprehensive framework, often guided by theories such as Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar, enables a detailed analysis of how diverse modes collaboratively construct persuasive messages in digital advertisements (Ma, 2024).

By going beyond linguistic appeal alone, brands can access deep psychological triggers, using visual and semiotic resources to create more immersive and convincing narratives that shape consumer perceptions and behaviors. The strategic deployment of visual semiotics in advertising, therefore, allows brands to convey intricate meanings and associations through visual cues and symbols, thereby influencing consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior (Naeem, 2026).

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, multimodality refers to the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, where these modes may reinforce each other, fulfill complementary roles, or be hierarchically organized in constructing meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In advertisements, multimodality can be seen through the interaction between visual elements such as images, colors, typography, and layout with linguistic elements that work together to create persuasive messages and influence audience interpretation. Through this combination of semiotic modes, advertisements are able to

communicate meanings more effectively and attract consumers' attention emotionally and visually.

As a result, modern advertisements such as those produced by McDonald's do not merely present information they orchestrate complex interactions between modes to construct compositional meanings that reinforce the brand's identity as a reliable provider of energy and satisfaction (Kress & Leeuwen, 2021). This interaction between visual and verbal elements strengthens the persuasive power of the advertisement and enables audiences to interpret the intended message more effectively. Among global industry leaders, McDonald's stands out for its consistent integration of multimodal strategies into its promotional materials (Kress & Leeuwen, 2021). A prime example of this is their innovative visual campaigns, in which the brand not only displays food but creates complex metaphors to represent its products (Boujena et al., 2021). This interaction between visual and verbal elements strengthens the persuasive power of the advertisement and enables audiences to interpret the intended message more effectively.

This analysis will apply established semiotic frameworks to deconstruct the verbal and non-verbal cues present in selected advertisements, elucidating their denotative and connotative layers (Safitri & Jemian, 2025). This interaction between visual and verbal elements strengthens the persuasive power of the advertisement and enables audiences to interpret the intended message more effectively. This study specifically investigates the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic resources within selected McDonald's advertisements to decipher how these multimodal elements collectively construct persuasive messages and reinforce brand recognition (Kyzy, 2025). Although these advertisements may seem simple at first glance, their underlying complexity raises important questions about how they actually function beneath the surface. This research specifically focuses on peeling back the layers of selected McDonald's advertisements to identify the multimodal elements such as images, text, and symbols that are used (Alifah & Hidayat, 2024). More importantly, this study explores how these different parts not only exist alongside each other, but actually interact and "communicate" with each other to create a single, powerful message for the audience. Based on this focus, the study is guided by two research questions. First, what multimodal elements are used in the selected McDonald's advertisement? Second, how do these multimodal elements interact to construct meaning in the advertisement? These questions are important because the advertisement does not rely on language or image separately, but on the combination of several semiotic resources that work together to produce persuasive meaning.

To achieve this, the study focuses on two main objectives. First, it aims to describe the visual and linguistic components, such as the use of distinctive foods and striking typography, in order to explain the function of each element in the brochure advertisement. Second, it aims to describe the interaction between the two modes, particularly how visual metaphors such as a fuel nozzle pouring soda into a glass work together with slogans such as "Fuel up... feel good!" to create a cohesive message that goes beyond simple food promotion.

The significance of this research has two aspects. For readers and consumers, this research offers a critical perspective on how everyday advertisements influence their perceptions, teaching them to read the hidden layers in marketing. This research also provides practical insights for advertisers and marketing practitioners on effective multimodal design strategies, demonstrating how visual-linguistic synergy can strengthen brand messages. Furthermore, for the academic community, this research serves as a valuable reference for students and researchers in the fields of linguistics, communication, and media studies, contributing to a broader understanding of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) in a commercial context (Alifah & Hidayat, 2024). Therefore, the significance of this study can be seen from both practical and academic perspectives. Practically, the findings may help readers, advertisers, and marketing practitioners understand how effective multimodal design strategies can strengthen promotional messages. Academically, this study can serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in linguistics, communication studies, media studies, and the analysis of visual-verbal interaction in advertisements.

By exploring these dynamics, this research contributes to the field of social semiotics, presenting a modern case study of how global corporations navigate cultural and psychological landscapes to maintain market dominance through sophisticated communication (Alam et al., 2026). This contribution is particularly important because it reveals that a brand's success depends not only on the quality of its products, but also on its ability to speak to its collective audience.

In addition, this analysis serves as a bridge between abstract theory and practical reality, showing how theoretical concepts such as multimodality Kress & Leeuwen (2021) are actually used as crucial business tools in the real world. This analysis highlights how global giants strategically tailor their messages to suit modern, busy, high-energy lifestyles, ensuring they remain a constant and reassuring presence in an ever changing society. Ultimately, by understanding these sophisticated communication techniques, we gain a clearer picture of how the media influences our culture and how brands succeed in establishing themselves as irreplaceable icons in the minds of millions of people. The scope of this study is limited to one selected McDonald's advertisement brochure. Therefore, the analysis focuses only on the visual and textual elements found within the advertisement, including color, image composition, typography, slogan, product display, and symbolic representation. This limitation allows the research to provide a focused and detailed interpretation, although the findings cannot be generalized to all McDonald's advertisements or all fast food promotional materials.

To build a solid foundation for this analysis, it is essential to explore the theoretical framework that explains how advertisements can communicate effectively with our minds. In this study, multimodal discourse refers to a form of communication that uses several modes, such as written language, images, colors, layout, typography, and symbols, to create meaning. These modes do not work independently but interact with one another to shape how the audience understands the message. Meanwhile, advertisement refers to promotional material designed to inform, attract, and persuade consumers about a product, service, or brand. In the context of this study, the advertisement is understood not only as a marketing tool but also as a semiotic text that communicates ideas, values, and brand identity. The first and most critical concept to consider is multimodality. In everyday life, we often assume that words are our primary means of sharing information, but in the world of professional communication, the reality is much more complex. As emphasized Kress & Leeuwen (2021), meaning is never formed by a single mode various semiotic sources work together to convey a message. Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar is particularly useful for this study because it explains how images communicate meaning through several dimensions. Representational meaning refers to what is shown in the image, such as the food products, symbols, and objects presented in the advertisement. Compositional meaning refers to how these elements are arranged, including their placement, size, salience, and visual hierarchy. Interpersonal meaning refers to how the advertisement builds a relationship with the viewer, for example through color, perspective, visual appeal, and emotional engagement. These three dimensions help explain how the McDonald's advertisement constructs meaning not only through what it shows, but also through how it organizes and presents its visual elements. This implies that in any advertisement, the text, color choices, photo lighting, and even font style are not merely decorative choices they are active team members working in harmony. When these modes interact, they create a synergy that is far stronger than any single element, allowing brands like McDonald's to tell rich and complex stories in a matter of seconds of audience attention.

Based on this visual foundation, we also need to pay attention to the specific role of language in advertising. Although images may initially attract our attention, it is often the strategic use of words that guides our final decision-making process. The power of language lies in its ability to resonate with our personal experiences and current needs. Recent research by Rahmawaty et al. (2024) emphasizes this, stating that "language in advertising that is relevant to the interests of the target consumer can increase its persuasiveness and convince customers to buy." This means that effective advertising language does not just describe the product; it reflects the lifestyle and desires of consumers. For example, when advertisements

use words that align with consumers' needs for efficiency or emotional comfort, this builds a bridge of trust between the brand and the buyer, so that the call to action feels like a natural choice rather than just a sales promotion.

By combining these two perspectives, we can see that successful advertising is a carefully crafted social semiotics event (Agustia et al., 2025). The visual mode sets the emotional tone and provides context, while the choice of language serves as a persuasive anchor that connects the product to the reality of consumers lives. In the case of McDonald's "fueling up" campaign, the visual metaphor of a gas pump conveys the concept of energy, while the specific language used reinforces that this energy is easily accessible and satisfying. Together, these elements transform a simple food product into a meaningful symbol of vitality and happiness that directly responds to the interests and needs of busy modern consumers.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of multimodal elements in advertising communication. For example, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) argued that visual resources such as color, image composition, and layout function as meaningful semiotic systems that shape audience interpretation. Similarly, O'Halloran (2008) emphasized that meaning in advertisements is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes rather than through language alone. In the context of digital marketing, Feng & O'Halloran (2013) found that the integration of visual and verbal elements enhances persuasive effects and strengthens consumer engagement. Furthermore, Alaei & Ghaemi (2018) revealed that multimodal resources in commercial advertisements play a significant role in constructing brand image and influencing consumer attitudes. However, most previous studies have focused on general advertising discourse or specific semiotic elements separately, with limited attention to how global fast-food brands such as McDonald's employ intersemiotic relationships between visual and linguistic modes to simultaneously construct persuasive meaning and reinforce brand identity. Therefore, further investigation is needed to explore how these multimodal resources interact to create effective brand communication strategies.

Several previous studies have discussed multimodal discourse in advertising. Afriansyah, for example, analyzed Wanda Coffee television commercials and found that the commercials promoted messages of diversity, togetherness, and social harmony. Another study by Lestari and Pratiwi examined McDonald's video advertisements on YouTube and showed that the advertisements strengthened brand identity, attracted consumers, and highlighted the improved quality of beef burgers. In addition, Alifah and Hidayat's study on Wardah cosmetics advertisements revealed that linguistic messages and visually appealing product displays work together to promote products and reinforce brand identity. These studies show that multimodal strategies are commonly used in advertisements to construct persuasive meanings, but they also indicate that more attention is still needed on how print-based fast-food advertisements combine visual and linguistic modes. The research gap of this study lies in its focus on a printed McDonald's advertisement brochure rather than digital or video advertisements. Most previous studies have examined commercials, YouTube advertisements, or digital promotional materials, while printed brochures from global fast-food brands have received less attention. Moreover, this study specifically highlights how the metaphor of food as "fuel" is constructed through the interaction of slogan, image, color, and layout. This makes the study relevant because it examines not only what visual and linguistic elements appear in the advertisement, but also how those elements cooperate to build a single persuasive message.

METHOD

The methodology of this study is carefully designed to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of how brand messages are constructed. To achieve this, the research utilizes a qualitative descriptive method, which is ideal for exploring the complex meanings hidden within social phenomena like advertising. Rather than focusing on numbers or statistics, this approach allows for a detailed thick description of how various signs and symbols work

together to influence the viewer. By using this design, the study can effectively interpret the quality and depth of the communication strategies employed by global brands.

The primary subject of this investigation is a specific McDonald's advertisement brochure, chosen for its rich use of visual metaphors and persuasive language. This brochure serves as the central piece of evidence for the analysis. To ensure the findings are grounded in both reality and theory, the sources of data for this study include the physical brochure itself and a collection of peer-reviewed journal articles. These academic sources provide the necessary theoretical framework to validate the observations made during the analysis, ensuring that the interpretation of the advertisement is consistent with established semiotic principles.

To organize the findings, the primary instrument used in this research is a systematic process of taking detailed notes. The note-taking instrument was used to record both visual and linguistic components found in the McDonald's advertisement brochure. The visual components included color, imagery, product placement, layout, symbols, and logo positioning, while the linguistic components included slogans, lexical choices, typography, and persuasive expressions. This instrument helped the researcher classify each element before interpreting how the elements interacted to construct meaning. This involves a meticulous dissection of the advertisement, where every visual and linguistic component, from the specific shade of red in the background to the bold typography of the slogan, is carefully recorded. By noting these individual elements, the researcher can analyze their specific functions and, more importantly, observe the interplay between them. This systematic documentation ensures that no detail is overlooked, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how the brochure anchors its message of energy and satisfaction in the consumer's mind.

The process of gathering data for this study followed a structured and systematic path to ensure that every layer of meaning within the advertisement was captured. The first crucial step involved identifying the specific advertisement to be analyzed, focusing on a McDonald's campaign that offered a wide variety of both visual and textual information. During this stage, special attention was paid to the textual elements, such as the catchy slogans and the specific lexical choices used by the brand. By selecting an ad that equates food with energy, the study established a clear foundation for exploring how language and imagery work together to persuade the modern consumer.

Once the advertisement was selected, the next phase was to transcribe the multimodal elements into a format that could be easily studied. This was not a simple task of copying text, but rather a detailed translation of the visual world into descriptive data. This transcription included documenting the non-verbal cues, such as the placement of the fuel nozzle, the vibrancy of the colors, and the bold nature of the typography. By turning these visual signs into written descriptions, the researcher was able to treat the image as a text that could be read and analyzed through a social semiotic lens.

Finally, the collection process was concluded by organizing the data systematically. All the transcribed visual details and linguistic choices were categorized into a structured framework, allowing for a clear comparison between what is seen and what is read. This organization is essential for identifying the interplay or synergy between different modes, ensuring that the final analysis can accurately explain how these individual pieces combine to form a unified, persuasive message. By following this rigorous procedure, the study ensures that its findings are based on a solid and transparent body of evidence.

The final and most critical phase of this research involves a deep, three-step analytical process designed to decode the sophisticated communication strategies used by McDonald's. The journey begins by analyzing the visual features in isolation to understand their specific psychological impact. This involves a meticulous examination of the color palette, such as the use of high energy reds and yellows, as well as the imagery, overall layout, specific products featured, and the symbolic weight of the visual metaphors. By focusing on these elements, the study can identify how each visual choice acts as a signifier that sets a specific mood or suggests a particular value, such as speed, freshness, or vitality.

Once the visual components are understood, the analysis shifts to interpreting the intermodal relationships between text and image. This stage is important because multimodal meaning does not emerge from isolated elements. A slogan may direct the viewer's interpretation of an image, while an image may strengthen or clarify the meaning of a slogan. Therefore, the analysis pays attention to how visual and linguistic modes support one another in creating a persuasive message about energy, enjoyment, and product satisfaction. This step is where the true "magic" of advertising happens, as it explores how the linguistic messages like the slogan "Fuel up... feel good!" interact with the visual metaphor of the fuel nozzle and the food. Rather than looking at them as separate parts, the study investigates how they support, contradict, or expand upon each other to create a synergy of meaning. This stage reveals how the text anchors the image, ensuring the consumer interprets the visual metaphor exactly as the brand intended as a promise of energy and satisfaction.

The final step in the process involves concluding multimodal meaning-making. By synthesizing the findings from the visual and intermodal stages, the study can explain how the advertisement functions as a whole to influence the viewer's perception. This conclusion moves beyond the surface level of a burger and a drink to describe the broader social semiotic message the conceptualization of McDonald's as an essential, high-energy fuel for the modern lifestyle. Ultimately, this systematic analysis provides a clear and evidence based answer to how global corporations use sophisticated multimodal tools to maintain their dominance in the psychological landscape of the consumer.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

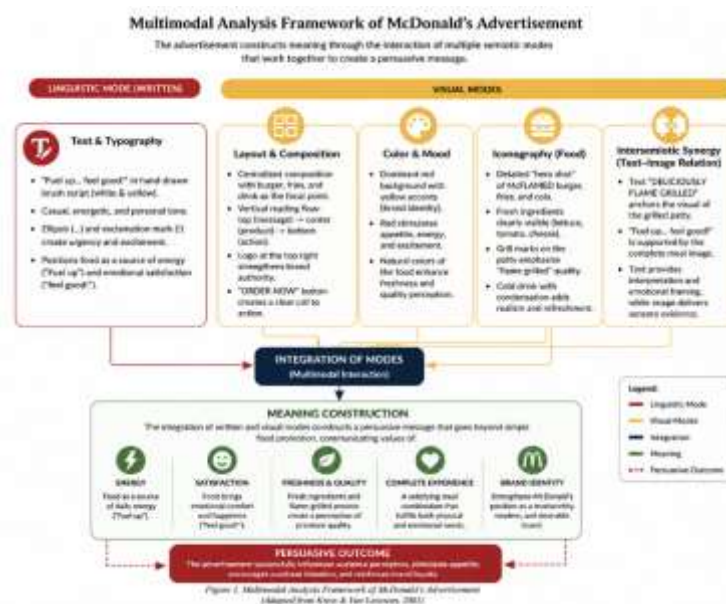


Figure 1

The findings of this study show that the McDonald's advertisement applies multimodal discourse strategies through the integration of linguistic and visual modes to construct persuasive meanings. Based on the visual framework above, the advertisement combines written text, typography, layout, color, food imagery, and intersemiotic relations to communicate messages about energy, satisfaction, freshness, and brand identity.

The linguistic mode is represented through the slogan "Fuel up... feel good!" which uses a hand-drawn brush script typography in white and yellow colors. The typography creates an energetic, casual, and personal tone, while the use of ellipsis and exclamation marks adds excitement and urgency. Linguistically, the phrase "Fuel up" positions food as a source of energy, whereas "feel good!" associates the meal with emotional satisfaction and comfort. These findings indicate that the written mode functions not only to provide information, but also to emotionally persuade consumers.

The visual mode is constructed through layout and composition, color and mood, and iconography of the food products. The centralized composition places the burger, fries, and drink as the main focal points, guiding viewers' attention directly toward the products. The vertical reading path from the promotional message at the top, to the food image in the center, and finally to the "ORDER NOW" instruction at the bottom creates a clear persuasive structure that encourages consumer action. In addition, the prominent placement of the McDonald's logo strengthens brand recognition and authority.

Color also plays an important role in meaning construction. The dominant use of red and yellow reflects McDonald's brand identity and creates an atmosphere associated with appetite, warmth, energy, and excitement. Meanwhile, the realistic natural colors of the burger ingredients, such as green lettuce, melted cheese, and grilled meat, enhance the perception of freshness and quality. These visual elements contribute to the advertisement's persuasive appeal by making the food appear more attractive and satisfying.

Furthermore, the iconography of the food products strengthens the idealized representation of the meal. The burger is presented through a detailed "hero shot" in which each ingredient is clearly visible and aesthetically arranged. The visible grill marks on the patty reinforce the phrase "deliciously flame grilled," suggesting authenticity and premium quality. The cold beverage with visible condensation also creates a sensory impression of refreshment and enjoyment. These findings show that food imagery is strategically used to stimulate appetite and consumer desire.

The findings also reveal a strong intersemiotic synergy between text and image. The linguistic expressions directly support the visual representations, while the visuals strengthen the emotional meaning of the text. For example, the phrase "deliciously flame grilled" is visually supported by the charred burger patty, and the slogan "Fuel up... feel good!" is represented through the large and satisfying meal composition. This interaction between verbal and visual modes creates a cohesive persuasive message that communicates not only food promotion, but also ideas of comfort, pleasure, energy, and modern lifestyle satisfaction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the McDonald's advertisement successfully integrates multiple semiotic modes to construct persuasive meanings and influence audience perception. Through the interaction of linguistic and visual elements, the advertisement creates a strong emotional connection with consumers while simultaneously reinforcing McDonald's brand identity and encouraging purchasing intention.

The discussion of this study highlights how the McDonald's advertisement successfully applies multimodal discourse strategies through the interaction of linguistic and visual elements. Based on the findings, each semiotic mode contributes to the construction of meaning, while all modes work together to create a persuasive and emotionally engaging advertisement. This supports Kress and Van Leeuwen's theory that multimodality involves the use of several semiotic modes that may reinforce one another, fulfill complementary roles, and organize meaning hierarchically within a communicative product.

From the linguistic perspective, the slogan "Fuel up... feel good!" plays a significant role in shaping the persuasive message of the advertisement. The use of informal brush style typography creates a casual, energetic, and friendly atmosphere that makes the advertisement feel more personal and approachable. This finding suggests that typography is not only a visual decoration but also an important semiotic resource that carries emotional and ideological meanings. The phrase "Fuel up" positions food as a source of energy and physical support, while "feel good!" extends the meaning into emotional pleasure and satisfaction. Through this combination, the advertisement constructs the idea that consuming McDonald's products can provide both physical fulfillment and emotional comfort. Therefore, the written mode functions as a persuasive strategy that emotionally connects consumers with the product.

The discussion also shows that visual composition contributes strongly to the effectiveness of the advertisement. The centralized arrangement of the burger, fries, and beverage immediately directs viewers' attention toward the food products as the main focus. This visual hierarchy reflects the principle of salience in multimodal discourse, where important elements are emphasized through size, position, and placement. The vertical

reading path from the slogan at the top, to the food image in the center, and finally to the "ORDER NOW" instruction at the bottom guides viewers systematically through the advertisement. Such organization encourages audiences to move psychologically from awareness, to desire, and finally toward purchasing action. In addition, the placement of the McDonald's logo in a prominent position reinforces the company's authority and strengthens brand recognition. This demonstrates how layout and composition are strategically designed to influence audience interpretation and consumer behavior.

Color also plays a crucial role in constructing meaning within the advertisement. The dominant use of red and yellow reflects McDonald's established visual identity and creates strong psychological effects on viewers. Red is commonly associated with excitement, warmth, appetite, and energy, while yellow symbolizes positivity, happiness, and friendliness. The saturated red background intensifies the visual appearance of the food and makes the products appear more attractive. At the same time, the realistic natural colors of the burger ingredients, such as green lettuce, yellow cheese, and brown grilled meat, strengthen the perception of freshness and quality. These findings indicate that color is not simply used for aesthetic purposes, but also serves as a semiotic resource that shapes emotional responses and consumer perceptions.

Furthermore, the iconography of the food products strengthens the persuasive effect of the advertisement. The burger is presented through a detailed "hero shot" in which every ingredient is clearly visible and neatly arranged. This idealized representation creates an image of perfection and encourages viewers to perceive the product as delicious and premium. The visible grill marks on the burger patty visually support the phrase "deliciously flame grilled," reinforcing the impression of authenticity and high quality preparation. In addition, the cold beverage with visible condensation creates sensory realism, allowing viewers to imagine refreshment and satisfaction. Such visual techniques are commonly used in food advertising to stimulate appetite and create desire. As a result, the advertisement transforms ordinary fast food into a symbolic product associated with pleasure, freshness, and quality.

The discussion also emphasizes the importance of intersemiotic synergy within the advertisement. The verbal and visual elements do not work separately, but rather complement and reinforce one another in constructing meaning. The phrase "deliciously flame grilled" gains stronger meaning because it is visually supported by the charred burger patty, while the slogan "Fuel up... feel good!" is represented visually through the large and satisfying meal arrangement. This interaction between text and image creates a unified persuasive message that communicates more than simple food promotion. The advertisement promotes ideas of energy, emotional satisfaction, comfort, and modern lifestyle fulfillment. This finding strongly supports Kress and Van Leeuwen's argument that meaning in multimodal communication emerges through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the McDonald's advertisement effectively combines linguistic and visual modes to create persuasive communication. Through typography, layout, color, imagery, and intersemiotic relations, the advertisement constructs emotional engagement and influences audience perception. The integration of these semiotic resources allows the advertisement not only to promote food products, but also to create symbolic meanings associated with happiness, energy, freshness, and consumer satisfaction. Therefore, this study confirms that multimodal discourse analysis is an effective approach for understanding how advertisements construct meaning and persuade audiences through the interaction of multiple communicative modes.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the McDonald's "Fuel up... feel good!" advertisement effectively constructs persuasive meaning through the integration of visual and linguistic elements. Using a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework, the research reveals that typography, color, layout, imagery, and slogan work together to create a cohesive message that associates McDonald's products with energy, enjoyment, and emotional satisfaction. The

findings indicate that the advertisement does more than promote food products; it constructs a lifestyle image that resonates with the needs and aspirations of modern consumers. The analysis further shows that visual elements, such as the red and yellow color palette and the fuel-nozzle metaphor, function as strategic semiotic resources that stimulate appetite, urgency, and the idea of energy replenishment. At the same time, the slogan "Fuel up... feel good!" provides a linguistic anchor that clarifies and strengthens the intended message. This intermodal synergy demonstrates that persuasive meaning emerges from the interaction of multiple communicative modes rather than from any single element alone. The study contributes to Multimodal Discourse Analysis by illustrating how global brands use visual and verbal resources to shape consumer perceptions and strengthen brand identity. It also highlights how advertising transforms products into symbols of lifestyle, identity, and emotional experience within contemporary consumer culture.

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