

## A Social Semiotic Interpretation of Corporate Image Advertising in the Nigerian Oil Industry

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### Abstract

*The study of the language of the oil industry dissected from a semiotic perspective has been consigned to the background and examined from other perspectives like nominalization and lexis translation, thus, making the research knowledge permeable. The oil industry which is the economic foundation of Nigeria requires linguistic intervention to comprehend the style options made available to the industry in terms of its use of specialized language and semiotic modes in reaching their target audience. This study identified and analyzed the visual and linguistic components associated with the selected corporate advertisements disseminated by two organizations in the Nigeria oil industry; Oando and MRS Oil to realize how these resources convey meanings. The data of the study are five online visual advertisements analyzed using the visual grammar framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The study considers how various modes work together to enhance meaning potential and appeal to the mind of stakeholders associated to each oil company and their identity. Findings show that the use of conceptual and symbolic images and salient features embodies the industry's strategic objectives and corporate image. The study concludes that corporate adverts function as an advertising instrument to promote organizations beyond their products by incorporating their corporate identity.*

Keywords; Semiotics, Visual images, Corporate advertising, Oil industry, Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

The current Nigerian economic situation revolves around the oil industry which is why it is considered the nation's largest industry and the principal source of revenue, accounting for about ninety (90) per cent of all export value and nine (9) per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020 (Varrella, 2020), thus, the relevance of the industry to Nigeria's financial framework is essentially crucial. Nevertheless, the blueprints for economic diversification and the industry's inclination to negative media on account of social responsibility are possible factors that may conceivably affect the industry if the organizations involved are not proactive enough in

investing and projecting a good corporate reputation that creates and bolsters a positive corporate image that influences the public perception of the oil industry and communicates their brand values. Hence, corporate image advertisement which is a means of bolstering corporate image has become indispensable to the oil industry.

Language with no impediment to its elements in terms of written, spoken and visual elements has persistently been utilized with the intention to influence and persuade. Organizations use language to strategically situate themselves according to their values, market themselves to draw in potential stakeholders and communicate their orientation to their audience while providing the necessary information to prevent wrong insight about the organization. Along these lines, it is no question that the survival of any organization depends on the general public perception. Subsequently, the reaction of the audience to any business is based on the creative use of language.

Therefore, this study deals with corporate image advertising as a tool in communicating brand identity claims, social initiatives by examining the semiotic resources employed to create a favourable corporate image of the oil industry towards stakeholders and customers. This paper aims to uncover the reflections of language as they are visible in the online visual corporate advertisements using the Visual Grammar theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

The qualitative and descriptive approach was adopted in this study which analyzed the visual and verbal structures employed in the corporate adverts of two companies in the Nigerian oil industry. Five visual adverts from Oando and MRS Oil gathered from the online space were selected, analyzed and discussed.

## **Literature Review**

### **1.1 Corporate Advertising and the Language of Corporate Image Advertising**

Wilcox, et al, (2003 cited by Humeric & Bicakci 2015) points out that the purpose of corporate advertising is not to sell the products and services of an organization, rather, to advocate the organization's strategies and enhance public perception. Furthermore, as a means to create awareness about their corporate social responsibility initiatives which build a positive corporate reputation which is essential in managing public perception. Language and different modes in advertising can be used to construct organizational identities. Organizations use language to communicate corporate culture, epitomize their ideologies, values and narratives within the organization and advertising campaigns. The context or culture influences the language which can be formal and structured, informal and specialized (see Humeric & Bicakci 2015, Ionos 2019). Sudarsan (2015) examines how in the consumer ecosystem, semiotics lays out fertile ground for how organizations provide meanings, implications and representations. Promoting corporate image through advertising involves the use of signs, symbols and logos. The notion of semiotics in corporate advertising comes in terms of studying the signs and symbols embedded in such adverts that create awareness, cultivate brand value and shape consumer understanding in that specific context. Verbal and visual patterns in corporate adverts are contextualized and their meanings deciphered and communicated through semiotics by interfacing pieces of those signs and ideas in their relevant fields which provides insightful knowledge about an organization to their audience and constructs customers' identities. The compelling arrangement of visual and verbal patterns can reinforce the brand message and value to the organizations' target audience.

### **1.2 Corporate Image Advertising in the oil industry**

Bhasin (2017) posits that organizations like cigarette companies, oil drilling and exploration companies, pharmaceutical companies and mining companies that are extremely vulnerable to controversies need to routinely invest in corporate advertising to keep their image stable in the market. Oil companies must therefore, find a way to recount their brand values while additionally exhibiting their strategies to be socially responsible which is where corporate advertising comes in which creates a more intuitive relationship with potential and existing customers. One of the advertising strategies employed in the oil industry is visual corporate advertising which incorporates visual and verbal patterns, infographics amongst others.

In Nigeria, mostly the major oil marketers publicize their services and corporate social responsibility and such adverts are generally done during festive periods and national holidays such as, Independence Day, Workers' Day, Children's day, Eid-Al-Fitr and Christmas where the language nuances of that period are creatively used to communicate to their customers and also through social media. Nevertheless, a few oil companies intermittently release corporate adverts to keep in contact with their shareholders and stakeholders to address social issues and communicate their position towards environmental concerns involving climate change and economic concerns where corporate advertising is viewed as a significant resource in managing and controlling negative media and to improve the overall perception of the organization. In 2010, Chevron Corporation launched a worldwide advertising campaign titled "We Agree" which was pointed towards demonstrating their values as an organization and the more prominent value they provide in meeting the world's demand for energy as addressed by Rhonda Zygocki, Vice President of Policy, Government and Public Affairs at Chevron (Ramon 2010).

### **1.3 Social Semiotics**

Halliday's systemic functional grammar provides the framework for social semiotics which focuses on meaning determined from the contextualization and interpretation of semiotic resources. Thibault (2004 cited by Fredlund 2014) characterized semiotics as the "act of meaning-making". From the definition, semiotic resources are the actualization of meanings that are selected based on the accessible resources and associated with the social contexts which are always susceptible to change. The theory describes language as the product of social processes which explains that to satisfy the communicative needs of people, language is shaped by the social context to fulfil its given functions in terms of expressing power relations, values and social structures through different modes such as written, visual (Jewitt & Henriksen 2016).

Within the corporate environment, semiotics provides a means for describing and deciphering how meaning is produced and conveyed within corporate advertisements. Arboledas (2017) posits that the approach is a fundamental form of human communication which improves the communicative potential of any brand by conveying the same message to different and diverse audiences through ensuring that greater and more extensive audiences can be reached effectively. Along these lines, he further explained that brands and organizations far and wide utilize striking ways in which symbols, signs and icons engage with various target markets, audiences and customers. Hence, semiotics serves to convey to potential customers the message that brands need to relay to them through a visual representation. This leads to the notion of signs and the systematic study of those signs and meaning-making. Halliday's functional grammar diagrams three language frameworks- phonological, semantic and lexico-grammatical. The semantic framework outlines three metafunctions- ideational, interpersonal and textual. These metafunctions serve as the premise of Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar theory.

## **2. Method**

The qualitative and descriptive approach was adopted in this study which analyzed the visual and verbal structures employed in the corporate adverts of two companies in the Nigerian oil industry. The researcher purposively selected five visual adverts from; Oando and MRS Oil Nigeria Plc gathered from the online space. The premise of this study is the analysis of the diverse semiotic resources employed in promoting their corporate image for the purpose of acquiring a better understanding of the language of the oil industry and how visual advertisements appeal to stakeholders and customers through semiotic constructions while propagating the image and services of the oil industry.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

#### **Visual Grammar**

Visual grammar developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) draws from Halliday's functional grammar to develop the grammar of other semiotic modes with the notion that visual images are similar to linguistic structures and that, 'visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 2). The grammar serves as a framework for obtaining meaning mapped across various semiotic modes- visual or verbal- in images through metafunctions. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) adopt Halliday's semantic metafunction to outline the three metafunctions in visual grammar- representational meaning, interactive meaning, and composition meaning.

The representational meaning manages how the relations between participants in images are represented as well as the manner in which their experiences are visually encoded (see Agustia 2019). The interactive meaning corresponds with Halliday's interpersonal function in which the premise is on establishing and maintaining social relations. In this context, we observe and analyze the social relations between the interactive participants and the represented participants and the evaluative orientations that participants adopt towards each other and to the world represented by the text (Hu & Luo 2016). There are four components to the dimension of interactive meaning; contact, social distance, angle and modality through which social meanings are encoded.

The compositional meaning is identifiable to Halliday's third metafunction which is the textual function. This involves the manner wherein representational and interactive meanings relate, cohere and are integrated to create a meaningful whole. The elements for analysis within this framework are; information value, salience and framing. Information value examines how elements are placed in the image, the values attached and reflected through three visual arrangements; left and right, top to bottom and center and margin. The left and right composition is structured horizontally and addresses given to new information that is, from acknowledged and recognizable data to something unfamiliar or unknown, top and bottom represent ideal to real information, while center and margin imply emphasis. Meanwhile, the second framework of compositional meaning is salience which Machin (2007 cited by Hu & Luo 2016) describes as "where certain features in composition are made to stand out to draw the viewer's attention". These features attract the viewer's attention in various degrees and are achieved through variation in size, tonal contrast, sharpness of focus, colour contrast, perspective (see Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, Hu & Luo 2016, Yang 2016, Agustia 2019). On the other hand, framing discusses the relationship between the elements which are connected or disconnected with the presence or absence of framing devices.

### 3. Findings

As earlier mentioned, the data for this study comprises five purposively selected advertisement images of Oando and MRS Oil Nigeria Plc. These images are qualitatively analyzed in this section using the theoretical methodology of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar.



**Image 1: Oando**

The Oando corporate advert is conceptualized with the image of a dark-skinned woman with enormous, bold and colourful fashion accessories against a monochrome background with verbal elements at the base of the image along with the logo at the edge. The represented participant facial features are clearly defined with her head slightly lifted and her eyes closed like she is in a trance or is luxuriating in the glow of the sun notwithstanding, she appears static. Her skin complexion is a symbolic feature that is within the African spectrum, as dark as unrefined petroleum and glossy like the glint of oil against a surface. It goes without saying that the Nigerian oil company is projecting their pride in their rich African heritage as stated in the image "We are proudly African" whilst also accommodating the substance known as black gold also situated within the continent.

Therefore, the natural resources which the company deals with come to mind- crude oil which is also known as black gold as when it is mine, it is black which may be a reference to her skin complexion. The participant is symbolic where the lady is the carrier and her headgear and earrings are the symbolic attributes. The three predominant colours excluding black and white are Oando's brand colours and are incorporated on the salient fashion accessories-head gear and earrings- however, not without reason. The salient fashion accessories with the symbolic colours may be representative of the strategic plans and responsibilities they are engaged in to move the company forward and interface better with their stakeholders and customers.

Notwithstanding, It is essential to note that, the oil industry is a male-dominated field and women are often considered to not possess the specialized technical capacity required in oil production and are often relegated to the background, consequently, they account for a significantly smaller share of the workforce than they do in almost every other sector (see Ajanaku 2019 in The Nation) Hence, the use of a lady for the corporate advert may be considered strategic, in the sense that this may be a means for empowering gender balance in the industry by attracting the female population. Oluseun Solanke, Principal Reservoir Engineer Oando explains that "the industry has begun to appreciate the value of gender balance and how it impacts the populace".

The arrangement of the represented participants follows the top-bottom and center margin structures which accounts for ideal-real and salient information. From the above analysis, it has been observed, that the participant represents different kinds of meaning which are essential to the picture as a whole. The lady occupies a substantial part of the overall frame hence, making her salient through size, her complexion and notable colourful adornments. It is additionally observed that the imperative 'EXPLORE AFRICA' is in block letters for emphasis to layout the objective of Oando which is to explore the vast untapped natural resources of Africa which is ideal and projecting their economic responsibility to the nation.

There are four paragraphs in the text at the base of the image which serves to provide more information which is to show the endeavours of the oil industry in its economic responsibility to Nigeria and Africa at large. The narrative of the first paragraph rebrands the organization as an 'integrated energy group' subsequently, creating a new identity; the following paragraph conveys their current and continuous activities, the third accentuates their long term strategic plan in the industry while the last paragraph which involves two simple declarative sentences communicates the indigenous heritage of the oil company and re-emphasizes who they are. This shows their pride in their heritage and their plan to harness Nigeria's natural resources proves their economic responsibility to a nation that is reliant on crude oil. In 2015, a Vanguard news article reported that the country loses about fifty trillion naira annually from untapped resources that abound in the nation's soil. The use of specialized language 'upstream', 'downstream' and 'integrated' ensures it caters to their audience and shows that said audience should have at least a mediocre understanding of the terms in the oil industry. Hayes (2021) explains that "many large oil companies are called integrated because they combine upstream activities with midstream and downstream operations, which take place after the production phase through to the point of sale". Likewise is the use of pronouns 'we' and 'our' to create a sense of solidarity with their audience.



Image 2: Oando

Represented in the image are offshore oil rigs used in the oil and gas industry for oil mining with one of them at a far distance which paints the picture of an active oil farm where the ground is rich, therefore, making the corporate advert conceptual. Looking at the structural body of any oil rig- onshore and offshore, there is a section called 'derrick' which is core and responsible for supporting the drilling device of the rig. Ideal derrick & structures (2020) describes derrick as 'a support structure that holds the drilling apparatus and oil drill operations rely on the use of derricks for their production'. The derrick in the image is conceptualized with the use of ants to form the structural body while the ants at the middle and bottom symbolize the gears and other parts that work hand in hand with the derrick to achieve the purpose of mining oil. The operational function of the derrick can be said to be synonymous with the duties of ants in a colony where they work together and support each other as a team to achieve their duties just like the derrick and other parts work to support the drilling apparatus and also one of Oando's shared value which is teamwork as reflected and emphasized by the ants.

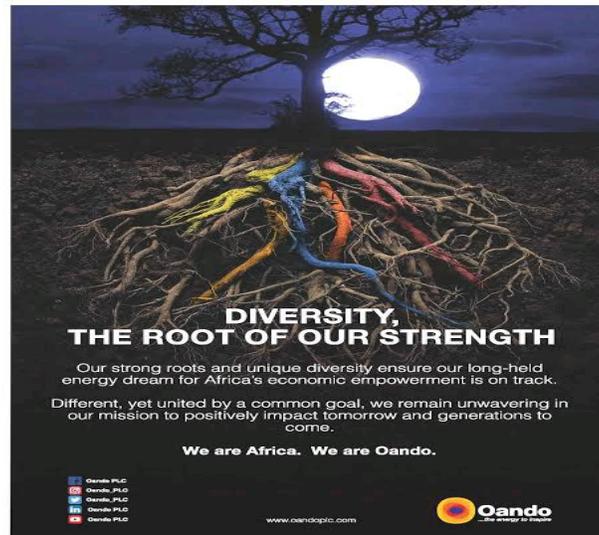
Additionally, the derrick is shaped like a power mast which is an energy source. Similarly, the verbal element at the top of the image is emblematic as the colour fades and blends from a deep blue to a reflective orange that reflects the sunbeam on a portion of the letters just like the reflection of the sun against solar panels.

The choice of the above symbolic attributive features brands Oando as an organization that is built based on the aggregate fortitude and vision of its people to propel the company forward in their economic and operational responsibility which they are dedicated to.

The elements of contact and social distance are not identifiable in the image as it is conceptual, therefore, the interactive dimension will examine the modality markers. The depiction of the oil rigs is sketched and not the actual pictures with colours and depth and defined details. The primary parts are highlighted but not detailed with definite lines. Ants are used to represent the structure of the derrick; nevertheless, they are clearly illustrative of the real deal. More so, the colours are monochrome with traces of brown for the ants. There is the absence of light and shade and all these, in terms of modality are low. However, based on the context of the oil and gas industry and the communication purpose of the advert, it can be inferred that the image has high modality, thus, appropriate for their target audience.

Information value is realized through the arrangement of elements in the image. In this image, there is the top-bottom structure that encapsulates the ideal and real information. '*A new major is emerging in Africa*' is positioned at the top which is ideal which implies that the objective to be a major in the industry is actively being pursued and placed above other objectives. The bottom which is classified as 'real' is the verbal message that speaks about the company and communicates their brand message and corporate responsibility to their customers. The image at the center is the oil rig with the ants which is salient, attracting the viewers' attention and offering more information. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:206 as cited in Olowu & Akinkurolere 2015) when discussing the centrality of images suggest that 'for something to be presented as the central means that it is presented as the nucleus of the information which all other elements are in some sense subservient'. The ants are right in the middle which attracts attention and based on the sharpness of focus, makes them more salient. They are the only participant not in a sketched format and also with more body details and natural depth. Another salient element is the text at the top; *A new major is emerging in Africa*- the text is fully capitalized with a blend of colours that represents Oando. All these make for salience and communicate the objective of the oil company.

There are five sentences in the text at the base of the image and one at the top. The content serves to reinforce the message suggested by the represented participant. The message of the text centres on the economic potential made plausible, by their focus on the energy potential of the continent harnessed through their 'resilience' and 'vision' and is portrayed through parallel structures, simile as well as the use of specialized language. Example; 'An ant is only as strong as its colony; a company only as strong as its people'.



**Image 3: Oando**

The conceptual nature of the message equips it for analysis based on the elements of conceptual processes. In the classificational process, advert belongs to the overt taxonomy as the participants are realized in an unequal and non-symmetrical composition. The root, the body of the tree and the moon are at an unequal distance. This draws more attention to the root as it dominates the most space in the image. In the analytical process, there should be a part-whole structure of participants in which there are two kinds of participants the carrier (the whole) and the possessive attribute (the part). In the image, the root and the statement **DIVERSITY, THE ROOT OF OUR STRENGTH** are the carriers which are the focal point for the readers. The root can be a representation of fuel pipelines which run underground to different outlets as well as the source of support and strength for growth, the colours of the roots are Oando's brand colours represent diversity as the message being passed, the barely visible body of the tree implies the product of their endeavours in investing in Nigeria, thus, all components have symbolic meaning and the combination of them embodies and underscores the message of the organization. The moon which is the solitary source of light in the image serves as a source of energy just like Oando's role in energy provision.

In terms of interactive meaning, the background is nighttime and detailed, there is the representation of shade from the clouds and the depth of the soil making it high in modality. In the corporate advert, the tree is at the top while the message 'We are Africa. We are Oando' with their logo and business pages are at the base of the image. The tree which is at the top is ideal, as it mirrors the ideal result of their work in Nigeria in terms of growth. The message 'We are Africa. We are Oando' with their logo are more real as they identify with their heritage and situate themselves as the oil company best situated to manage the energy relations in the continent since they are indigenous and know the fundamental requirements of the country. The center image is the 'root' which is salient attracting the reader's attention and offering more information by emphasizing the point being made. The root is made salient by its size which occupies more than fifty per cent of the image as well as the diverse colours of some parts of the root. Likewise, the colour contrast between the roots and the darkness of night is impactful. The text in the image is also salient as the attention of the viewer is drawn. The message, '**DIVERSITY, THE ROOT OF OUR STRENGTH**' is in boldface for emphasis. A cultural thing for Nigeria is the fact that we are diverse in our cultural background yet that diversity gives room for growth and development.



**Image 4: MRS Oil Nigeria Plc**

The image represents the company, MRS Oil Nigeria Plc. The represented participant is a lady who appears to be driving which is being considered as 'doing something', hence fitting the description of Kress and van Leeuwen narrative processes. The blur at the window indicates she is in motion and most likely cruising thereby enjoying the smooth driving nature of the car due to patronizing the oil company. On the steering wheel are both hands which show the lady is focused and being responsible and a way for MRS Oil to brand themselves as reliable, responsible and dependable. Wade (2018) explains that keeping both hands on the wheel prepares you for unexpected road incidents and reduces putting yourself and others at risk. The image of the lady occupies about ninety per cent of the corporate ad which emphasizes the intention of the company. The purpose of the represented participant is to use her to reemphasize the name of the company and mirror the nature of their image. The participant's eyes are directed towards the road albeit, the viewer cannot see it, and the eye-line formed is a vector which makes the process reactionary and the participant can be identified as a reactor because she is reacting to the unknown object (the smooth driving experience).

There is no Phenomenon; hence, the reactions are non-transactional. The represented participant conveys the expression of a blissful driving experience through her facial expression and direction of glance, leading the viewer to feel the manner in which she feels and believe what she accepts. Her eyes are not completely opened which is the result of the sun's reflection and wind. The beauty of the image is captured in perfect stillness despite the motion of the car. The brand logo at the bottom of the ad draws the viewers' attention back to the company.

In examining the established and suggested relationship between the represented participants and audience, Kress and van Leeuwen present gaze, social distance, angle and modality. The gaze direction of the represented participant which is vital to meaning-making in this image shows that there is no direct contact with the viewer, thus creating what Kress and van Leeuwen calls an 'offer' image. The represented participant is offered as an item of information that is, MRS Oil which is an organization focused on providing efficient services in the downstream sector. Nevertheless, her facial expression is used to establish a relationship with the viewers which in this sense, is her smile that portrays a happy look giving the audience more than enough information on her satisfaction with the company and creates a form of social affinity with the viewers. Her facial expression makes the viewer question the justification for her happiness which also makes them want to identify with the MRS Oil brand. This is a means of promoting the brand and setting the tone for the company which implies that the viewers can likewise feel satisfied by doing what the represented participants do. The represented participant is used to represent MRS Oil.

The field of vision is the head and shoulders of the represented participant which suggest the close personal business. Based on Edward Hall's depiction of social distance relations (Jung & Ly 2015), the close personal distance should suggest an intimate relationship between the represented participant and viewer. The producer made the distance intimate to create a familiar and close relation to the audience in order for them to feel secure in their brand.

The represented participant is shown from the side at an oblique horizontal angle. As a result, the viewer in this case is detached from the participant and her world. What the viewer sees is not part of his or her world; this world belongs to the participant and the viewer is not involved with it. The image is highly saturated as the colours are natural and rich. In terms of illumination, there is the full representation of light and shade. The detailed background which is the interior of the car, however, is faded into a dark shade. A part of the background is a blur which is the window looking on to the outside and the blur makes it more realistic as though she is in motion. All these reflect realism.

The verbal element in the image is the sentence, 'FOR A SMOOTHER DRIVING EXPERIENCE, CHOOSE MRS'. It is a compound sentence that is persuasive and imperative. The attention of the viewer is drawn to the later part of the sentence through the use of comma which enables the sentence to carry semantic importance. The imperative 'CHOOSE MRS' is emphasized with red colour which is also the company's colour as a creative way to use the literal meaning of their name as well as the abstract form to refer not just to the represented participant but also to contextualize the oil company, bring it to mind and promote it. The imperative clause clearly shows persuasive invitation or encouragement for prospective customers to choose their brand over others in which 'choose' suggests that there are other options however, their brand should be the first option because they offer a 'smoother driving experience'.



**Image 5: MRS Oil Nigeria Plc**

The message being conveyed is clear merely by observing the image. According to WHO (2020 cited by Ngene & Anorue 2021), globally, an estimated 1.4 million people die yearly as a result of road traffic accidents and twenty to fifty million people are debilitated. Contextualizing it to Nigeria, Welcome and Pereverzev (2010 cited by Ngene & Anorue 2021) observed that, approximately fifty (50) per cent of accidents on Nigerian roads are linked to alcohol consumption. This communicates an important safety issue. MRS Oil Nigeria Plc is an integrated downstream player in the Nigerian oil industry and despite not being within the alcohol manufacturing industry but remotely linked to the issue through provision of petroleum products that enables driving, participated in the 'don't drink and drive' campaign through their platform to give their viewpoint which will inadvertently translate to influencing their audience. This positions the company as one that is socially responsible and proactive in addressing such social health and safety issues. Hence, will portray a good public reputation to their shareholders and stakeholders.

The corporate advert is used as a platform to dwell on a core health and safety issue. Evident in the image is a glass of beer with an overturned car in it. The golden translucent colour of the drink, the fizz in the glass and the beer ring top at the side implies alcohol and the overturned car is a symbolic means of communicating the conceivable end result of drinking and driving. From the reflection of shadow from the beer ring top and the glass cup, it is clear that both are on a surface which may be a way of saying that, it is good to go for drives, relieve your mind from stress and have fun but at the same time, be aware of your decisions, leave the alcohol on the table before going out because the overturned car may be a foreshadow of the consequential implications.

The corporate image under the context of health and safety achieves high modality with modality markers such as full-colour saturation, natural depth and representation of light shade. The information value of the image follows the right to left placement that suggest the given to new information. In the image, the verbal element placed at the right is acknowledged information while on the left is the glass cup with a car which is the foreshadowed element. Salience is achieved through the variation of colours in the textual elements; ‘DON’T DRINK AND DRIVE’ is emphasized in red as a mandate to drivers to preserve their lives and that of others. Additionally, the overturned car in the alcohol immediately captures the attention of the audience and communicates the message effectively. Analyzing the verbal elements, imperative clauses were employed to give directives without going round in circles in order to be explicit and directly forthright; DON’T DRINK AND DRIVE. STAY ALIVE.

#### 4. Discussion

The analysis of the five selected images, using the three metafunctions in Visual Grammar enabled the researcher to come up with a few findings. Firstly, the frequent use of images that are mostly conceptual and symbolic helps in the contextualization of their meanings. To a certain degree, this requires the interpretation of the images to be reliant on juxtaposing the verbal and visual elements. In the analysis, a few corporate adverts could be interpreted only to a certain extent based on the visual elements alone like Image 2, which incorporates the oil rigs and the ant colony that instantly implies teamwork and coordinated effort as well as Image 5, with a glass of beer and an overturned car in it. Secondly, the study finds out the use of salient features to attract the viewer’s attention in various degrees. From the analysis, it is evident that the corporate adverts of the oil industry employ salience to effectively communicate the message and objectives of the oil companies through variation in size, colour, and perspective. For example, the represented participant in Image 1, with the bold and colourful earrings and headgear, the ant colony in Image 2 that immediately draws attention and the roots in Image 3 are all evident. Thirdly, there is the use of specialized elements in the oil industry. Ilechukwu & Umeodinka (2016) posit that every trade or industry has its own specialized terms which can undoubtedly confuse outsiders. This is on the grounds that, they each have systems and frameworks that require specialized terms for proper discourse and comprehension. The use of specialized elements in the corporate adverts involves verbal elements like ‘upstream’, ‘downstream’ and ‘integrated’ and visual elements in Image 2 such as the oil rigs and derrick. This particular finding is in line with O’Neill (2017) who explains that “like many other professions, the oil industry uses a lot of specific jargon and vocabulary”. The use of specialized language in the corporate adverts ensures the message is addressed to their target audience and shows that audience should have a mediocre understanding of the terms in the industry.

Another finding of the study revolves around the frequent use of long sentences. Many studies in advertising have established that the sentences used should be short in order to capture the attention of the audience; however, in the corporate adverts of the oil industry, longer sentences were employed to appropriately communicate their corporate image. The data used for this study reveal rather long sentences as follows:

**Image 1:** *Through strategic investment, local knowledge and a dedication to the development of Africa’s oil and gas industry, Oando has boldly transitioned from a dominant downstream player to an integrated energy group.*

**Image 2:** *In today’s dynamic landscape, we remain focused on harnessing Africa’s vast energy potential whilst offering immense growth and investment opportunities across the energy value chain.*

**Image 3:** *Different, yet united by a common goal, we remain unwavering in our mission to positively impact tomorrow and generations to come.*

Finally, the study finds out the use of declarative and imperative sentences; imperatives were employed to give directives in terms of advice and instructions, while the declaratives inform the audience about the objectives and activities. The following are examples from our data:

**Image 1:** *EXPLORE AFRICA*

**Image 4:** *CHOOSE MRS*

**Image 5:** *Don’t drink and drive. Stay alive*

**Image 3:** *We are Oando. We are proudly African.*

These findings come with implications. Although the language of advertising in the Nigerian oil industry is basically for advertisements, the specialized nature of the language of the oil industry, to a certain degree, influences the corporate adverts, from specialized visual and verbal elements to the syntactic style. Also, the language of corporate advertising in the Nigerian oil industry does not bluntly display its products or services; it rather proffers their strategic objectives that cater for the social concerns in the society. The adverts reflect the health and safety responsibility, operational responsibility and economic contribution of the oil industry. Finally, the relationship between the verbal and visual elements conveys the deeper meaning which embodies the industry's strategic objectives and corporate image. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996 cited by Yang 2016) points out that, there are some relationships between the visual and the verbal elements; yet, the image is not completely dependent on the verbal text for it has its own structure and organization and the verbal text in a different context, may mean something different. The formal nature of the corporate adverts incorporates the visual and verbal elements with the verbal text being slightly dominant in terms of meaning construction as it reflects the meaning of the image more clearly. Therefore, the combination of both elements communicates meaning more comprehensively and efficiently.

## 5. Conclusion

Applying Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) Visual Grammar, this study analyzed five corporate adverts of Oando and MRS Oil Nigeria Plc. The main findings are the use of conceptual and symbolic images, the use of salient features, the use of the oil industry specialized elements and specialized language, the frequent use of long sentences and the use of declarative and imperative sentences. Hu & Luo (2016) opines that advertisements influence us somehow with the considerations and opinions built in the choice of represented participants, colour and scene-setting. In the same vein, (Matheson 2005 cited in Daulay 2019), extols that, semiotic analysis uncovers how adverts construct our identities as customers. Accordingly, we conclude that corporate adverts function as an advertising instrument to promote organizations beyond their products by incorporating their corporate identity. The highlighted visual elements build up a sense of credibility. The textual elements also establish brand identity, value, initiatives and corporate responsibilities which are responsible for redirecting the perspective of customers. Therefore, the purpose of the corporate adverts was effectively conveyed through the cohesive interplay of visual and verbal elements to construct a positive corporate image while paying attention to the oil industry peculiarities.

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