
Semiotic Analysis of Visual Propaganda and Emotional Appeals in MTN's *No be Juju be that* Advertising campaign

Emeke Precious Nwaoboli*, Ogunyemi E. Oluwafisayo Ph.D. & Daniel Toochukwu Ezegwu*** Ph.D.**

*Department of Mass Communication, Glorious Visions University
(Formerly Samuel Adegboyega University), Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria.*

ABSTRACT

This study is an analysis of visual propaganda and emotional appeals in MTN's No be Juju be that advertising campaign. The objectives of the study were to analyse the effectiveness of MTN's No be Juju be that advertising campaign in creating a positive image for the brand; examine the effectiveness of the use of emotional appeals in MTN's No be Juju be that advertising campaign and scrutinise the impact of the use of propaganda techniques in the advertising campaign. The theoretic framework used was the semiotic theory. Furthermore, semiotic analysis was used as research design and semiotic analysis guide served as research instrument. The study found that the MTN No be Juju be that advertising campaign effectively used emotional appeals and visual propaganda techniques to create a positive association with the MTN brand, emphasizing its reliability and quality. However, the lack of mention of any potential drawbacks or issues with the use of 5G technologies may reduce the advertisement's perceived credibility and effectiveness. Arising from the findings of the study, the researcher recommended among other things that telecommunication advertisers should be more transparent with the use of propaganda and emotional appeals in advertisements and avoid exaggerating the capabilities of their services.

KEYWORDS: *Semiotics analysis, visual propaganda, emotional appeals, MTN, advertising.*

INTRODUCTION

Visual propaganda and emotional appeals have been widely used in advertising campaigns worldwide and the use of visual propaganda and emotional appeals is a common advertising strategy used by companies to capture the attention of their target audience and increase brand awareness. This, perhaps, is because research has shown that visual elements can have a significant impact on consumers' attitudes and behaviour towards a brand (Nwaoboli 2022; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Similarly, emotional appeals have been found to be effective in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions (Wang, 2008).

In advertising, visual propaganda refers to the use of visual elements, such as images, colours, and graphics, to convey a particular message or influence the audience's perception of a brand or product. The goal of visual propaganda is to create a visual representation that aligns with the brand's values or message and appeals to the audience's emotions. Conversely, emotional appeals are persuasive techniques that aim to evoke strong feelings or emotions in an audience to persuade them to take a certain action or adopt a particular viewpoint. Emotional appeals seek to evoke a particular emotion in the audience, such as fear,

happiness, or sadness, to persuade them to take action, such as purchasing a product or service (Wang, 2008).

In the telecommunications industry, advertising plays a critical role in attracting and retaining customers. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission, as of June 21, 2023, the total number of active mobile phone lines in Nigeria was 223 million 338 thousand 215 (NCC, 2023). This presents a significant market for telecommunications companies, and advertising is one of the ways these companies compete for customers. MTN is the most prominent telecommunications companies in Nigeria as it has the largest market share (NCC, 2021). MTN has also invested heavily in advertising campaign spending over 7 billion naira (approximately US\$18 million) on advertising in 2020 (BrandSpur, 2020).

Despite the significant investment in advertising, it is unclear how effective visual propaganda and emotional appeals are in persuading consumers to choose one brand over the other. This addressed this gap in the literature by exploring the use of these strategies in the *No be Juju be that* campaign of MTN and comparing its effectiveness in persuading consumers to patronise the brand.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Visual propaganda and emotional appeals are two common strategies used in advertising campaigns to influence the audience's perception and behaviour. However, it is unclear how effective these strategies are in persuading consumers to choose one brand over the other. Despite the significant investment in advertising by MTN, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of visual propaganda and emotional appeals in its advertising campaigns even though some research on advertising and propaganda such as Jowett & O'Donnell (2018) exist.

Therefore, this study sought to examine the use of visual propaganda and emotional appeals in the advertising campaigns of MTN with specific focus on *No be Juju be that*. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by providing insights into the strategies used by telecommunication companies to promote their products and services and to identify the most effective approaches in persuading consumers.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. analyse the effectiveness of MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign in creating a positive image for the brand
2. examine the effectiveness of the use of emotional appeals in MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign
3. scrutinise the impact of the use of propaganda techniques in the advertising campaign

Conceptual Review

Concept of Advertising

Advertising is a powerful tool used by companies to promote their products and services, increase brand awareness and persuade consumers to take a particular action. Advertising has been defined as any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or

services by an identified sponsor (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). The goal of advertising is to create a lasting impression of the brand or product in the minds of consumers and to influence their behaviour (Egbulefu & Nwaoboli, 2023).

Advertising can take various forms, including television commercials, print ads, billboards, online ads, and social media advertisement and the choice of advertising medium depends on the target audience, budget, and marketing objectives (Egbulefu & Nwaoboli, 2023). For example, television commercials are effective in reaching a broad audience, while online advertisements are more targeted and cost-effective.

One of the key components of advertising is the message (Egbulefu & Nwaoboli, 2023). The message should be clear, concise, and relevant to the target audience. The message should also be consistent with the brand's values and positioning. The use of visual elements, such as images, colors, and graphics, can enhance the message and create a visual representation that aligns with the brand's values or message (Akbari, 2015).

Another important aspect of advertising is the use of emotional appeals. Emotional appeals seek to evoke a particular emotion in the audience, such as fear, happiness, or sadness, to persuade them to take action (Albert-Miller & Royne-Stafford, 1999). For example, an advertisement for a life insurance policy might use fear as an emotional appeal to convince consumers to purchase the product by showing a family struggling to cope with the sudden loss of a loved one.

Visual Propaganda

Visual propaganda is a communication strategy that uses visual elements, such as images, symbols, and colours, to convey a particular message or influence the audience's perception of a brand or product. Visual propaganda is often used in advertising, political campaigns, and other forms of communication to create a visual representation that aligns with the desired message (Yang & Wang, 2018).

Visual propaganda can be employed or used in various forms of advertising channels such as posters, billboards, television commercials, and social media advertisements. The choice of visual elements depends on the target audience, the message, and the desired effect. For example, an advertisement for a luxury car might use images of a sleek design and sophisticated passengers to create an image of exclusivity, affluence and status.

Visual propaganda is a powerful tool in communication because it can convey complex ideas and emotions quickly and effectively (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). Visual elements can create a lasting impression in the minds of the audience and influence their behaviour. For example, an advertisement for a charity might use images of starving children to evoke feelings of empathy and persuade the audience to make a donation.

However, visual propaganda can also be misleading and manipulative. Visual elements can be used to create a false impression or exaggerate the benefits of a product or service. For example, an advertisement for a weight-loss product might use images of an extremely thin model to create a false impression of what is achievable (Yang & Wang, 2018).

Emotional Appeals

Emotional appeals are a communication strategy that seeks to evoke a particular emotion in the audience to influence their perception or behaviour (Taute, McQuitty & Sautter, 2011).

Emotional appeals are often used in advertising, political campaigns, and other forms of communication to create a connection with the audience and persuade them to take a particular action (Merry, 2010). Emotional appeals are a type of persuasive technique that relies on emotions, rather than logic, to influence the audience. Emotional appeals can be used to create a sense of urgency, to inspire empathy or compassion, or to appeal to the audience's sense of identity or values (Merry, 2010).

According to Akbari (2015), an emotional appeal is a persuasive strategy that seeks to create an emotional response in the audience by using language or images that elicit feelings such as fear, happiness, or sadness. The goal of an emotional appeal is to engage the audience on a personal level and encourage them to take action based on their emotional response.

Emotional appeals can take various forms, including fear, happiness, sadness, anger, and guilt. The choice of emotional appeal depends on the message, the target audience, and the desired effect (Zheng, 2020). They are a powerful tool in communication because they can create a strong connection with the audience and influence their behaviour. However, emotional appeals can also be manipulative and unethical if not used carefully. Emotional appeals can create a false impression of reality or use emotions to exploit the audience's vulnerabilities (Zheng, 2020). For example, an advertisement for a luxury car might use images of a glamorous lifestyle to create a false impression of what is achievable.

No be Juju be that advertising campaign

MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign was launched in February 2023 by MTN Nigeria. As at June 20, 2023, the one-minute commercial had four million, two hundred and fourteen thousand and five hundred and thirty views on MTN Nigeria YouTube page. The commercial shows how distance barrier of an absentee wedding was virtually covered through MTN's 5G network in what seemed like "juju". It shows how individuals can stay connected with their loved ones, **no** matter the geographical distance.

The campaign's slogan, "*No be Juju be that*," is a colloquial that translates to "It's not magic, it's real" in English, and it sought to highlight the company's commitment to providing quality services to its customers without any hidden tricks or gimmicks.

The advertisement features a scenario where MTN's network connectivity and services come in handy, such as during emergencies, business transactions, and social interactions. The commercial also showcase MTN's investment in technology and infrastructure to provide efficient services to its customers. The use of local idioms and phrases in the campaign also makes it relatable and appealing to the Nigerian audience.

However, there are concerns about the campaign's use of cultural stereotypes and superstitions. The Urhobo culture was portrayed in the advert neglecting other cultures. Also, in most cases in African setting, a man can be absent in his marriage but it is rare for a woman to be absent but this was the case in the advert as the bride was in USA while the groom went to pay her bride price in Nigeria which may be seen by some Africans as taboo. Also, the use of the word "juju," which refers to traditional African magic, could be seen as reinforcing negative stereotypes about African culture. Nonetheless, MTN's intention with the campaign was to promote the idea that its services are not based on any mystical or supernatural powers, but rather on technological advancements and expertise.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Types of Visual Propaganda and the Power of Images and Symbols in Shaping Public Opinion

Visual propaganda is a powerful tool for influencing public opinion and attitudes through the use of images, symbols, and visual cues (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). There are several types of visual propaganda, including symbolism, stereotyping, emotional appeals, glittering generalities, and testimonials among others. Symbolism is a common type of visual propaganda that uses specific images or symbols to convey a message or idea, such as the use of a red rose to symbolize love or a dove to symbolize peace. Stereotyping, on the other hand, relies on oversimplified or exaggerated images to create a negative or positive impression of a group of people, such as the portrayal of certain ethnicities or nationalities in a negative light in political cartoons or posters (Usman, 2021).

Emotional appeals are another type of visual propaganda that uses images to create an emotional response in the viewer, such as the use of images of suffering or pain to create sympathy for a particular cause or group. Glittering generalities use positive words or phrases to create a favorable impression of a particular product, person, or idea, such as the use of words like "freedom" or "justice" to create a positive association with a political candidate or policy. Testimonials rely on endorsements from famous or respected individuals to create a positive impression of a particular product, service, or idea, such as the use of celebrity endorsements in advertisements (Rutherford, 2000).

In addition to these types of visual propaganda, there are several others that are commonly used in advertising and political campaigns. For instance, Name-calling is a type of visual propaganda that uses negative language to create a negative impression of a particular person, group, or idea, such as the use of labels like "terrorist" or "radical" to discredit a political view or individual. Card-stacking presents only one side of an issue, selectively using facts or information to create a biased or distorted view of a particular issue, while bandwagon appeals use the idea that "everyone is doing it" to create a sense of social pressure and conformity (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). Transfer is another type of visual propaganda that uses symbols or images associated with positive values or emotions to create a positive association with a particular product, person, or idea, such as the use of images of the Nigerian flag to create a positive association with a political candidate or policy. Finally, plain folks is a type of visual propaganda that uses images or messages that suggest that a particular product, person, or idea is "down to earth" or "ordinary," appealing to the values and beliefs of the average person (Forceville, 2013).

Persuasion through Emotions: How Advertising Uses Emotional Appeals to Influence Behaviour

Emotional appeals are a powerful tool in advertising and propaganda, as they can influence attitudes and behaviours by evoking specific emotions in the viewer (Taute, McQuitty & Sautter, 2011). There are various types of emotional appeals that can be used in creating a persuasive message. For example, fear appeals use threats or warnings to create anxiety and motivate action (Nwaoboli & Asemah, 2021). An anti-smoking campaign may use images of diseased lungs to create fear and motivate people to quit smoking. Similarly, guilt appeals use emotions such as shame or guilt to motivate people to take action. A charity may use images of starving children to create guilt and motivate people to donate money (Akbari, 2015).

Humorous appeals are another type of emotional appeal that uses humour or lightheartedness to create positive associations with a product or idea. A commercial for a fast food restaurant may use a humorous skit to make the product more appealing. Joy appeals use positive emotions such as happiness or joy to create positive associations with a product or idea. An advertisement for a vacation resort may use images of happy families enjoying their time together to create a sense of joy and happiness associated with the resort.

Sadness appeals use emotions such as sadness or sympathy to create a sense of empathy or connection with a particular cause or group. A charity may use images of sick or injured animals to create a sense of sadness and motivate people to donate money. Anger appeals use emotions such as anger or frustration to motivate people to take action. A political campaign may use images of unfair treatment or injustice to create anger and motivate people to vote for a particular candidate or policy.

In addition to these types of emotional appeals, there are other types that can be used in advertising and propaganda (Merry, 2010). Scarcity appeals use the fear of missing out on an opportunity or product to motivate people to take action. For instance, a limited-time offer or a product available in limited quantities may create a sense of urgency and scarcity, motivating people to make a purchase. Nostalgia appeals use images or messages that evoke feelings of nostalgia or longing for the past to create a positive association with a product or idea. A commercial for a classic car may use images of a vintage car driving on an open road to evoke feelings of nostalgia and create a positive association with the brand (Merry, 2010).

Trust appeals use images or messages that create a sense of trust or reliability in a product, person, or idea. For example, a company may use images of a trustworthy-looking spokesperson or a seal of approval from a respected authority to create a sense of trust in their product. Curiosity appeals use messages or images that pique the viewer's curiosity and make them want to learn more.

Theoretical Framework

Semiotic Theory

This study is premised on the semiotic theory. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their use in communication (Solik, 2014). The theory of semiotics originated in the early 20th century, with the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure developed the concept of the signifier and the signified, arguing that signs are composed of both a physical component (the signifier) and a conceptual component (the signified) (Barham & Everett, 2021). Peirce developed a more elaborate theory of signs, arguing that signs are part of a complex system of communication that includes not only language but also visual and other forms of communication.

The tenets of semiotics suggest that signs and symbols are used in human communication to convey meaning and that they can be analysed to understand the underlying cultural and social values that they represent (Solik, 2014). In the context of advertising, semiotics can be used to analyse the use of visual propaganda and emotional appeals in MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign.

The application of semiotics to advertising involves the analysis of signs and symbols used in advertising to identify the meanings and values that they represent. This can involve analyzing the use of color, imagery and other visual cues to convey meaning and influence

consumer behaviour. For example, the use of bright colors and bold fonts in an advertisement may be intended to create a sense of urgency or excitement around a product or service. Similarly, the use of emotional appeals, such as humor or fear, may be used to create a particular emotional response in the viewer and influence their behaviour.

In the context of the current study, semiotics could be used to analyse the visual propaganda and emotional appeals used in MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign. This involved a detailed analysis of the signs and symbols used in the advertisements, as well as an examination of the cultural and social values that they represent. By applying the principles of semiotics to the study, the researcher also gained valuable insights into the ways that visual propaganda and emotional appeals was used to influence consumer behaviour and perceptions in MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign.

Empirical Review

Yang & Wang (2018) study examined the effectiveness of emotional propaganda in advertising, specifically its impact on consumer attitudes and behaviour. The theoretical framework used in this study was the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The study used a quasi-experimental design, with a pretest-posttest control group. Participants were randomly assigned to either an emotional propaganda condition or a control condition, and were asked to view a series of advertisements for a fictitious product. The researchers found that emotional propaganda advertisements were more effective than neutral advertisements in increasing consumer attitudes toward the product, as well as purchase intent and actual behaviour. The study suggested advertisers should be mindful of the potential risks of using fear appeals, and should ensure that their messages are truthful, accurate, and not manipulative.

Akbari (2015) examined the different impacts of advertising appeals on advertising attitude for high and low involvement products. The study employed a quasi-experimental design approach involving 160 undergraduates from Islamic Azad Tehran University. There was random exposure of participants to four distinct persuasive messages per product. More so, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), t-test, and regression analysis were used to examine the effects of appeals on high and low involvement products. The findings indicated that the utilisation of both rational and emotional advertising appeals elicits a favourable impact on advertising attitude and purchase intention.

Albers-Miller and Royne (1999) examined international analysis of emotional and rational appeals in services vs. goods advertising. It sought to scrutinise the advertising appeals employed for both services and goods in four distinct nations, namely Brazil, Taiwan, Mexico, and the United States of America. Content analysis was used as research design and coding sheet as research instrument. The findings revealed that there are variations in the utilisation of rational and emotional appeals in relation to both the type of product and the geographical location. It added that the expansion of global commerce, coupled with a rise in the variety of service offerings, highlights the significance of comprehending efficacious promotional tactics for services vis-à-vis commodities in the international arena. The researchers concluded that cultural factors exert an influence on the utilisation of persuasive appeals, and that the interplay between product type and country is markedly manifested in advertising campaigns targeted at Taiwanese and American audiences.

This study on MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign is distinct from the other studies in that it focuses specifically on the use of emotional appeals in a single advertisement, rather than on a broader range of ads or products. Additionally, the study uses semiotic analysis as its research method, rather than surveys or experiments.

METHODOLOGY

Semiotic analysis which allows researchers to examine and interpret the meaning and messages conveyed in the advertising campaign through the use of signs and symbols was used as the research design for this study. Semiotic analysis served as research design as the researchers closely examined the symbols, positive emotionally loaded words, and vibrant colors used in the advertising campaign, as well as the scenes and emotions generated by the music and dance used in the advertising campaign. The researchers identified patterns and themes in the data to draw conclusions about how the visual propaganda and emotional appeals were used to create a positive association with the MTN brand. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. The researchers selected the MTN *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign which can be found online via <https://youtu.be/00cymivC6Io> as the sample because it was a prominent advertisement in Nigeria at the time of the study and was widely viewed by the public. The sample size for the study was one, as the researchers focused on a single advertising campaign. However, the researchers analysed the advertisement in-depth and used a rigorous qualitative research methodology to draw conclusions about the visual propaganda and emotional appeals used in the advertising campaign.

Data Presentation

Figure 1: Use of symbolism as propaganda technique



Figure 1 shows different scenes implying that the *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign of MTN used a variety of symbols to convey its message. For example, the use of colorful images of people and objects creates a sense of vibrancy and energy, which is associated with

the brand's message of reliability and quality. Also, MTN's logo was selected in the scenes with their colour, "yellow", dominating the setting of the scene. Also, the 5G display was a deliberate symbol to subtly let the consumers know that it is a higher technology at play.

Figure 2: Use of Glittering generalities as advert technique



The advertisement used positive, emotionally loaded words and phrases to create a positive association with MTN. For example, the use of the phrase *No be Juju be that* emphasizes the brand's transparency and reliability and that MTN 5G technological is not mystic but real.

Figure 3: Card Stacking Propaganda



In the MTN *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign, the focus is solely on the reliability and quality of MTN's network services. The advertisement does not mention any potential drawbacks or issues that users may face while using the 5G. In figure 3, the couples are shown radiating when the groom had a contact with his virtual wife.

Figure 4: Emotional Propaganda



Figure 4 shows the portrayal of people enjoying the benefits of using MTN's network services and dancing to the music being played. The scene could create a positive emotional response in viewers, which can lead them to associate MTN's brand with positive emotions propelled by the dance moves, radiant scenes and songs being played.

Emotional appeals used

Figure 5: Excitement appeal



Figure 5 showed the use of music and vibrant colors in the ad creates a sense of excitement and energy. This emotional appeal can make viewers associate MTN's brand with fun and excitement, which can make them more likely to use the brand's services.

Figure 6: Relief appeal



In Figure 6 depicts, the fear of being left behind or missing out is created in the advertisement, with the message that using MTN's network services is the solution to this fear. In the seen, the groom feels relief being able to make real contact with his bride who has been brought to the scene of the wedding in Nigeria from USA courtesy MTN's 5G.

Figure 7: Happiness appeal



Figure 7 creates a positive emotional appeal that makes viewers associate MTN's brand with happiness and satisfaction as the advertisement repeatedly showed happy people especially after the absentee bride residing in USA magically appeared in the wedding scene and was confirmed by the husband to be real and not *juju*.

Discussion of Findings

The MTN *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign used a variety of symbols, positive emotionally loaded words, and vibrant colors as visual propaganda techniques to create a positive association with the brand and emphasize its reliability and quality. The scenes in the advertisement portray people enjoying the benefits of using MTN's network services in a marriage ceremony where the absentee bride suddenly appeared in the wedding scene courtesy of MTN's 5G and the use of music and dance further enhanced the emotional appeal of the advertising campaign.

The advertising campaign's focus on the benefits of using MTN's network services is consistent with previous research that suggests that advertisements focusing on the benefits of a product tend to be more effective than those focusing on its attributes or features (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The positive emotional response generated by the advertising campaign is also consistent with previous research that suggests that emotional appeals in advertisements can be more effective than rational appeals (Taute, McQuitty & Sautter, 2011).

However, the advertisement's lack of mention of any potential drawbacks or issues with the use of 5G technology is a limitation. Previous research has shown that acknowledging potential drawbacks or negative aspects of a product can actually enhance its perceived credibility and effectiveness (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010) but MTN did not do this. This is important because consumers are increasingly aware of the potential negative effects of technology and may be skeptical of advertisements that do not acknowledge potential drawbacks or issues. Also, the advertising campaign made use of augmented virtual reality but this was highly exaggerated as the virtual reality may not be possible in a real life setting like the propaganda techniques and emotional appeals in the advertisement suggested although virtual reality is actually possible but the exaggeration in that advert is the rate of

fidelity. The exactitude as suggested in that advert is very debatable and rests on a lot of external factors.

While the propaganda techniques and emotional appeals used in the advertising campaign may have appealed to many MTN users and potential customers, the propaganda techniques used could discourage many customers and potential customers who are only appealed to by logic and facts and not emotions and the propaganda techniques used in the advertising campaign. Besides, although symbols were used as propaganda techniques to appeal to the conscience of MTN consumers, other cultures aside the Urhobos who were portrayed in the advertising campaign may consider the advertising campaign a stereotype of their culture and as such may be disinterest in it.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the MTN *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign effectively used emotional appeals and propaganda techniques to create a positive association with the MTN brand, emphasizing its reliability and quality. However, the lack of mention of any potential drawbacks or issues with the use of 5G technologies may reduce the advertising campaign's perceived credibility and effectiveness. Additionally, the advertising campaign's use of augmented virtual reality may have misled potential customers. Also, the propaganda techniques and emotional appeals used in the advertisement may not appeal to all MTN users and potential customers as some customers may be more appealed to by logic and facts rather than emotions and propaganda techniques. Arising from the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that:

1. Telecommunication advertisers should be more transparent with the use of propaganda and emotional appeals in advertising campaign and avoid exaggerating the capabilities of their services.
2. Telecommunication advertisers should always use a variety of advertising strategies to appeal to different types of customers, as some may be more appealed to by logic and facts rather than emotions and propaganda techniques.
3. Telecommunication advertisers should be more sensitive to cultural diversity in advertising campaign and avoid negative portrayals or stereotypes.

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