

# A Multimodal Analysis of Persuasion in English Billboard Advertisements

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## ABSTRACT

The exploration of multimodal strategies in commercial billboards is beneficial for understanding how advertisers use these techniques to persuade and influence viewers' purchasing behavior. The current study aims to explore multimodal persuasive strategies, incorporating both visual and rhetorical elements, in commercial billboard advertisements. It also seeks to examine how the integration of visual and rhetorical elements enhances the persuasive and manipulative impact of the advertised product. The dataset comprises two commercial billboards: one from the world-famous fast-food brand McDonald's and the other from the well-known English tea brand Twinings of London. The visual data is analyzed using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar framework. Additionally, the identification and analysis of rhetorical figures are conducted according to Leech's (1966) rhetorical classifications in English advertising. The study's findings indicate a strategic integration of visual and rhetorical multimodal strategies in the two selected billboards. Both advertisements incorporate distinctive visual and rhetorical techniques to persuade viewers of the value of the promotional products. The results of the analysis show that formal schemes were the most frequently used category of rhetorical figures across the analyzed billboards. Overall, the findings suggest that McDonald's and Twinings' commercial billboards are both visually and rhetorically persuasive and effective.

KEY WORDS: Multimodal Strategies, Visual Grammar, Commercial Billboards, Persuasion, Rhetorical Figures.

## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Advertisement plays a crucial role in delivering messages to people across the globe. Product, film, and media companies use advertising to introduce their products or convey messages directly or indirectly to viewers. Various mediums are employed in advertising, such as billboards, posters, and social media platforms. Advertising is regarded as a multimodal discourse, in which different modes such as color, sound, gesture, and imagery are combined to persuade viewers. The integration of these modes makes advertising discourse complex to analyze (Pratiwy & Wulan, 2018). This complexity arises from the use of both verbal and visual elements, such as images. Advertisements have attracted the attention of many researchers worldwide, who seek to understand how meaning is constructed and expressed through the integration of semiotic resources. They have also explored how persuasion is achieved through the interplay of visual and verbal semiotics.

The study focuses on the analysis of persuasive

strategies in English commercial billboard advertisement from a multimodal perspective. Previous studies (Guo & Feng, 2017; Qadir, 2023; Dawd & Salih, 2020) have examined persuasive language in English advertising discourse from multiple perspectives. These include analyses of visual elements in World Cup advertisements (Guo & Feng, 2017), investigations of visual rhetoric in political posters (Qadir, 2023), and explorations of covert persuasion strategies in English advertisements and political speeches (Dawd & Salih, 2020). However, there remains a lack of research specifically addressing persuasive strategies in English commercial billboard advertisements using a multimodal discourse analysis framework. This study aims to investigate the roles of visual and rhetorical strategies in persuading viewers of promotional products. Specifically, it investigates how visual elements such as images, color, framing, and salience are employed to strengthen the persuasive power of billboard advertisements. It also explores how rhetorical figures function as persuasive tools in English billboard advertisements and how these verbal devices

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enhance the overall persuasive impact. This research is significant for scholars and discourse analysts interested in multimodal or media discourse. It is also valuable for billboard designers, who can apply the study's findings to create more persuasive and visually appealing advertisements. Furthermore, it may benefit researchers, students, and readers seeking to understand how the strategic use of visual and rhetorical elements contributes to persuasion in multimodal texts. The purpose of this study is to explore the use of visual and rhetorical persuasive strategies in English commercial billboards from a multimodal perspective. To achieve this, the study poses the following research questions:

1. How do visual elements incorporate persuasive strategies in English advertising billboards?
2. How are Rhetorical figures integrated in English advertising billboards to persuade viewers?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that examines how meaning is constructed through the integration of multiple semiotic modes, including verbal, non-verbal, and visual elements. It extends Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, which identifies three meta-functions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Foundational scholars such as Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) through their influential work *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, and O'Halloran (2004) via the analysis of different semiotic resources in multimodal texts such as images have contributed significantly to MDA's development, emphasizing how different modes combine to express meaning. Additionally, MDA helps to understand the communicative meaning of a text through the analysis of different communicative modes, including both verbal and non-verbal ones. Visual Grammar (VG) is a widely adopted framework within MDA for analyzing visual design elements in texts, such as images and layout.

Advertisements, as carefully designed multimodal discourses integrate both verbal and non-verbal elements to influence consumers' buying behavior. Advertisement is highly considered as multimodal discourse, as it integrates distinctive communicative modes including visual and verbal to persuade the targeted audiences. According to Dahlal and Fahem (2020), advertisement is a particular type of communication funded by sponsors and utilizes various forms of mass media to promote visibility for products. Nevertheless, advertisements have varying communicative purposes or goals. For example, Cook (1992) outlined that the major goals of advertisements are to "amuse, inform, misinform, and

worry and warn customers." This statement is supported by Rozalina (2020), who asserts that companies use advertisements for different purposes, with one of the major goals being to persuade and manipulate customers. Advertisement has many types such as commercial, social, political, and so on as well as different forms such as billboard, social media, print, and so on. The present study focuses on commercial billboard advertisements. Billboard advertisements fall under the category of outdoor advertising.

Billboard advertising is considered one of the most traditional forms of advertising. It is particularly impactful and powerful in gaining visibility for promoted products and services because it utilizes tools such as larger text sizes, colorful designs, and celebrity endorsements to attract and persuade targeted viewers (Firdous et al., 2023). They are popular due to their direct influence on viewers, their verbal and visual impact, their ability to gain visibility, and their efficiency in promoting sales quickly (Taylor et al., 2006). Importantly, the major goal of advertisement, more precisely billboard advertising is to persuade the audience to purchase the promotional products.

Persuasion in advertising discourses has been a concern for many scholars. Persuasion is a language strategy used to shape people's beliefs, behavior, and perspectives, either positively or negatively. In advertisements, persuasion is closely associated with emotions, aiming to evoke viewers' feelings. In the context of advertising, persuasion specifically aims to motivate viewers to take actions such as purchasing the advertised products or services (Pelclová, 2010). To increase the persuasiveness of advertisements, advertisers employ various tactics. For instance, Davidson (1992, p. 3) notes that advertisers often use colloquial language as a strategy to appeal to viewers. Colloquial language refers to everyday language used in casual conversation (Fattah & Salih, 2022; Fattah, 2023). Leech (1966, p. 98) argues that the language of English advertisements is highly simple and colloquial. The use of rhetoric or rhetorical figures is another prevalent strategy in advertisements. These devices are often utilized to capture people's attention and increase the persuasive power of advertisements. Goddard (1998) emphasizes rhetorical language as a key factor in the success of advertisements. By incorporating rhetorical devices such as hyperbole and vivid language, advertisers make their messages more engaging and persuasive. According to Rozalina (2020), persuasive advertising language is rich in rhetorical features such as repetition, exaggeration, and imperatives.

There are beneficial studies that have examined persuasion in advertising from multimodal perspectives,

analyzing verbal and nonverbal strategies either separately or combined. For example, Guo and Feng (2017) investigate visual persuasive strategies in World Cup advertisements using Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework. They analyzed the three meta-functions of visual design: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. Their study found that eye contact and body language depicted in the images fostered a sense of solidarity and social connection between the represented and interactive participants. They also highlighted that elements such as color contrast, object size, and foreground-background distinctions enhanced the advertisements' persuasive and attention-grabbing power. However, while this study offers valuable insights into the role of visual strategies, it does not examine textual elements, particularly rhetorical strategies, nor does it consider how both visual and rhetorical strategies jointly contribute to persuasion in advertisements.

Qadir (2023) studied visual rhetoric in Kurdish electoral billboards using multimodal critical discourse analysis alongside Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar. Her findings demonstrated that Kurdish politicians deliberately used visual rhetoric to enhance their ethos (credibility), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical appeal). While this research contributes important insights into visual rhetoric, it focuses primarily on political advertising and gives limited attention to verbal rhetorical strategies. It also does not address commercial advertising contexts.

Dawd and Salih (2020) examined covert persuasion in advertising and political discourse through rhetorical figures. Findings reveal that tropes (metaphor, metonymy, allusion) function as effective covert strategies by conveying implicit meaning, whereas schemes (e.g., anaphora) remain overt. Case studies demonstrate how metaphors frame political narratives and metonymy creates product associations. The study concludes that tropes' semantic indirectness enhances persuasive efficacy by circumventing critical scrutiny while subtly influencing attitudes. Their implicit nature makes them superior to direct rhetorical devices for covert persuasion in mediated communication.

However, there is a notable gap in the literature specifically focused on English commercial billboard advertisements that analyze both visual and rhetorical persuasive strategies through a multimodal discourse lens. Other studies (Xing & Feng, 2023; Zakirullah et al., 2024) have explored persuasion in English commercial advertisements from multimodal perspectives. However, what distinguishes the present study is its focus on the persuasive language of English commercial billboards,

specifically through the combined analysis of visual and rhetorical strategies.

This study aims to demonstrate how the integration of visual and verbal semiotics is used to persuade, attract, and retain the attention of viewers toward promoted products, services, and ideas in English commercial advertisements. Furthermore, it seeks to highlight how rhetorical figures contribute to the persuasive impact of these advertisements.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research method to examine the issues under investigation. The qualitative approach is useful for exploring and identifying persuasive strategies in advertising discourses. The data of this study consist of two English advertising billboards that are purposively selected from advertising billboard by well-known brands such as McDonald's and Twinings. This study employs multimodality, including Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar (1996), and Leech's rhetorical figures (1966) for the process of data analysis. It relies on visual materials as its primary data source. This study provides an iterative process in which data collection and analysis often occur simultaneously, and it ends with the most significant findings and concluding points.

#### 3.2 Data for Analysis

The data for the current study consist of billboards available on the internet. The researcher selected billboards that include captions, as this characteristic is important for analyzing linguistic features, particularly rhetorical figures in the advertisements. The research data comprises two randomly chosen billboard samples, used purposive sampling. This study employs purposive sampling due to the qualitative nature and specific focus of the research. A small number of English-language advertisements were deliberately selected based on their clear use of both visual and verbal persuasive strategies. This method aligns with the study's aim to explore how visual and verbal semiotics are integrated in commercial advertising to influence viewer perception. These billboards are from two of the most prominent and well-known English (Twinings of London) and American (McDonald's) brands. The data were collected from Google,

(<https://www.behance.net/>)

And (<https://in.pinterest.com/>).

The selected billboards fall into two distinct commercial categories: food and tea. This variety in data

collection allows for a more detailed and accurate analysis of multimodal persuasive strategies in advertising discourse.

### 3.3 Framework for Analysis

This study employs different analytical models to examine the use of rhetorical figures and visual elements in advertisements. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) work on visual grammar, commonly known as the grammar of visual design, is used to analyze the visual strategies employed in advertisements. The Leech (1966) rhetorical classification for the analysis of rhetorical figures in English advertising billboards is used.

**3.3.1 Visual Grammar:** Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar stems from Halliday's theory of social semiotics. It explores how meaning is negotiated through the relationships between participants depicted in an image (Bilal et al., 2021). Visual grammar serves as a valuable framework for the analysis of visual resources in multimodal discourse. In systemic functional linguistics, Halliday identified three meta-functions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In their influential book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) adapted these linguistic meta-functions into three visual meanings: representational, interactive, and compositional.

Representational meaning, according to Guo and Feng (2017), refers to the relationship between the depicted participants in the image and the real world. This meaning can be realized through two processes: narrative and conceptual. The narrative process emphasizes action and interaction among participants (Ly & Jung, 2015), while the conceptual process presents participants in a more static, descriptive manner, highlighting characteristics such as profession, age, and personality. Conceptual processes are further divided into classificational, analytical, and symbolic types.

Interactive meaning describes how visual texts establish a sense of connection, solidarity, or distance between the represented participants and the viewers (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). This meaning is conveyed through four main systems: contact, social distance, angle, and modality.

Compositional meaning integrates elements of both representational and interactive meanings to form a cohesive visual message (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 176). It governs how information is structured and interpreted within the image. This is achieved through three key devices: information value (placement of elements), salience (visual prominence), and framing (separation or connection of elements within the layout).

### 4.3.2 Rhetorical Figures in Advertisement

Researchers have provided different classifications for rhetorical figures. The present study adopts Geoffrey Leech's classification of rhetorical figures in advertisements. In his influential book *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain* (1966), Leech identified fourteen rhetorical figures commonly used by advertisers to persuade and influence consumers. He categorized them into two main categories: phonological and formal schemes. Additionally, besides their persuasive function, rhetorical figures serve four other roles in advertisements: enhancing readability, memorability, attention value, and power selling (Leech, 1966, pp. 124-179).

Table.1

Rhetorical Figures Classification by Leech (1966)

Rhetorical Figures	
Formal Schemes	Phonological Schemes
Parallelism	Alliteration
Antithesis	Rhyme
Direct Address	Puns (wordplay)
Omission	
Parody	
Parataxis	
Metaphor.	
Hyperbole	
Neologism	
Rhetorical Questions	
Prosopopoeia	

### 3.3.3 The Adopted Model of Analysis:

Table (2) presents the integrated rhetorical-visual adapted model of analysis developed by the researcher. This model incorporates the classifications of visual structures and rhetorical figures proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Leech (1966).

Table (2):  
Model of Analysis

			Detection	Persuasion Impact Level				
				Low	Medium	High		
<b>Linguistic Analysis</b>	<b>Rhetorical Analysis</b>	<b>Formal Scheme</b>	Parallelism					
			Antithesis					
			Parody					
			Metaphor					
			Hyperbole					
			Prosopopeia					
			Neologism					
			Rhetorical Question					
			Parataxis					
			Direct Address					
		<b>Phonological Scheme</b>	Rhyme					
			Alliteration					
			Puns					
		<b>Rhetorical - Visual Integration</b>	<b>Visual Analysis</b>	<b>Visual Structures of the Images</b>	<b>Representational Meaning</b>	Conceptual Processes	Classification Process	
	Analytic Process							
	Symbolic Process							
	Narrative Process							
<b>Interactive Meaning</b>	Contact				Demand Gaze			
					Offer Gaze			
	Angle				Horizontal			
					Vertical			
	Social Distance				Intimate Distance			
					Close Personal Distance			
					Far Personal Distance			
					Close Social Distance			
					Far Social Distance			
	Modality				Public Distance			
Color saturation								
Color Differentiation								
Color modulation								
Contextualization								
Depth Representation								
Illumination								
<b>Compositional Meaning</b>	Information Value	Right/Left						
		Center/ Margin						
		Top/Bottom						
	Framing	Connected						
		Disconnected						
Salience								
Overall Results								

However, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Leech (1966) do not directly categorize the persuasive impacts of visual and rhetorical elements. Their frameworks are more qualitative and are employed to analyze meaning in multimodal texts. Additionally, they do not provide fixed measurements for the persuasive impacts of semiotic modes, but both offer detailed analytical descriptions and

checklists that can be formally adapted into rubrics to measure the persuasive impact levels of visual and rhetorical elements in commercial billboards as high, medium, or low. Table 3 presents the adapted rubrics for measuring the levels of persuasion of visual and rhetorical elements in commercial billboards.

Table 3  
The Adapted Rubrics for Measuring the Levels of Persuasion of Visual and Rhetorical Elements

Category	High Persuasion Impact	Medium Persuasion Impact	Low Persuasion Impact
Emotional Appeal	Strong emotional appeals like joy and desire.	Moderate emotional appeals.	Low emotional appeal, not triggering the desire and interest of the viewers.
Viewer Engagement	Strongly engaging the viewers to experience the advertised products.	Moderate engagement of the viewers.	Not engaging the viewers and making them to feel unimportant and detached.
Logical Appeal	Use of strong facts, advantages of the product, and comparisons to support the product.	Use of less persuasive facts or data.	use of unclear and unsupported claims.
Modality or Realism	High degree of realism and naturalism and use of high color saturation and natural lightings.	Moderate degree of realism and naturalism.	Low degree of realism and use of abstraction and cartoons.
Message clarity and Readability	Short, clear, and effortlessly and quick digestible messages.	Messages with partial clarity that require more effort to interpret.	Long, confusing, and ambiguous message.
Memorability	Memorable message that easily sticks to viewers' mind	Messages with partial memorability	Messages with no memorability.
Salience	Perfectly large sized elements, high contrast, and foreground placement.	Elements with medium sizes, balanced contrast.	Small sized elements, low contrasts, and background placements.

Importantly, this rubric is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Leech (1966). It is also contextually adapted to measure the levels of persuasion of visual and rhetorical elements in

commercial billboards.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS



Figure.2 (Twining's Advertising Billboard) (Received from <https://www.behance.net/>)

Table 4  
Analysis of Twinings Billboard Advertisement

				Detection	Persuasion Impact Level			
					Low	Medium	High	
Linguistic Analysis	Rhetorical Analysis	Formal Scheme	Parallelism					
			Antithesis					
			Parody					
			Metaphor	✓			✓	
			Hyperbole					
			Prosopopeia					
			Neologism					
			Rhetorical Question					
			Parataxis					
			Direct Address					
Phonological Scheme	Rhyme							
	Alliteration							
	Puns							
Rhetorical - Visual Integration	Visual Analysis	Visual Structures of the Images	Representational Meaning	Conceptual Processes	Classification Process			
				Analytic Process	✓		✓	
				Symbolic Process	✓		✓	
			Narrative Process					
			Contact	Demand Gaze				
				Offer Gaze	✓		✓	
				Angle	Horizontal	✓		✓
			Vertical	✓		✓		
			Social Distance	Intimate Distance				
				Close Personal Distance				
				Far Personal Distance				
				Close Social Distance	✓		✓	
				Far Social Distance				
				Public Distance				
			Interactive Meaning	Modality	Color saturation	✓		✓
Color Differentiation	✓				✓			
Color modulation	✓				✓			
Contextualization	✓				✓			
Depth Representation	✓				✓			
Illumination	✓				✓			
Brightness	✓				✓			
Information Value	Right/Left							
	Center/ Margin	✓				✓		
	Top/Bottom	✓		✓				
Compositional Meaning	Framing	Connected	✓		✓			
		Disconnected	✓		✓			
		Saliency	✓		✓			
Overall Results				High in persuasion				

### 1. Linguistic Analysis

Figure (1) contains a full box of Twinings Tea alongside a cup of tea and a tea bag labeled as "Darjeeling tea." The image's background shows beautiful scenery from Darjeeling town in India, an area covered by Darjeeling tea trees. Additionally, it features the Twinings of London logo, the product name "Darjeeling Tea," and the text "Steeped in Tradition." The text contains one rhetorical figure that is metaphor. The text is metaphorically used; the word 'steeped' is literally employed to describe the process of brewing tea leaves in hot water. The advertiser does not use 'steeped' literally to describe how tea leaves are soaked in water, but rather

metaphorically to claim that Darjeeling tea is not only soaked in hot water but also in Darjeeling tradition, culture, and history. The advertiser also indirectly or metaphorically wants to tell viewers that Twinings tea is grown in such a beautiful and traditional town in Darjeeling and is carefully made with love and tradition. In addition, the advertiser attempts to tie the product, "Twinings tea," with tradition, love, care, and history. This strategic use of metaphor is incredibly persuasive; it leads the imagination and makes viewers visualize how Darjeeling people grow and soak the tea leaves in hot water to make flavorful Twinings tea using traditional methods. It also increases its persuasive power by

enhancing the authenticity and quality of the brand, as it comes with care and love from a beautiful Darjeeling town.

The text follows formal schemes of rhetorical figures from Leech's (1966) classification. The advertiser purposefully followed formal schemes rather than phonological ones to make the text structurally short, clear, and comprehensive. This kind of clarity and comprehensiveness cannot be achieved through the use of phonological schemes, as they are mostly employed to give rhythmic structure to the text and increase its memorability.

## 2. Visual Analysis

### A. Representational Meaning Analysis

Figure (2) relies entirely on conceptual processes to convey meaning and the identity of the represented participants, the brand, and their relationships. It is conceptual rather than narrative because the represented participants are not engaged in any actions but are instead depicted through static and symbolic attributes. The symbolic attributes in this image, such as the teacup, the brand's logo, and the purple environmental landscape in the backdrop, are employed to describe the meaning and identity of the brand "Twinings of London." The golden teacup filled with amber-like Darjeeling tea is the main symbolic attribute, representing the brand's quality and nobility. Additionally, the brand's logo includes the text "Twinings of London," identifying Twinings as British and highlighting its long-standing heritage; it symbolizes the quality and authenticity of the brand. The purple environmental backdrop, showing the area where Twinings Darjeeling tea comes from (Darjeeling town in India), symbolizes the origin of Twinings Darjeeling tea. This identification of the originality of Twinings Darjeeling tea provides strong persuasive power to the product, encouraging viewers to purchase it. It can also effortlessly persuade viewers, as they know the product comes from Darjeeling, which is famous for flavorful and natural teas. The integration of purple and golden colors makes viewers visually and psychologically feel comfortable, safe, and trusting toward the advertised product and brand. It also represents the product and brand as luxurious, high-quality, and prestigious. This careful representation is highly persuasive in commercial ads, as it discusses the brand and product's identity, origin, tradition, and meaning through their symbolic attributes. Nonetheless, the image includes a conceptual analytical process, showing the whole-part relationships among the represented participants or visual elements. It represents the brand "Twinings" as a whole and other elements – such as the brand's logo, the product "Darjeeling tea," the product's origin (the backdrop landscape), the product's physical appearance (the cup of tea), the product's packaging, and its heritage as its parts. This strategic and

complete breakdown of the whole and parts assists viewers in understanding the product's components and what the brand or product offers them. It also makes the product feel trustworthy, as its components are fully displayed to viewers. This strategic integration of conceptual, symbolic, and analytical processes provides a powerful persuasive impact to the billboard. The symbolic attributes appeal to viewers' emotions, building their trust and interest in the product, while the analytical processes explain what the product offers and how its services differ from other brands. It also provides logical structure to the product, ultimately increasing its memorability and recall.

### B. Interactive Meaning Analysis

The image analyzed does not include any human figure with a direct gaze, making it an offer rather than a demand. This absence invites viewers to observe and evaluate the product Twinings tea without distraction or interaction. The advertiser deliberately excludes human figures to maintain focus on the product, implying it requires no human endorsement due to its quality, authenticity, and originality. This strategy encourages viewers to feel the product's luxury and prestige through deep observation, aligning perfectly with the analytical representation that simplifies viewers' examination of the product and its components. This approach enhances the billboard's persuasive impact by allowing viewers to establish trust and connection through observation.

The image is presented horizontally at a frontal perspective and at the viewer's eye level, suggesting involvement, inclusion, and equality between the product and viewers. This positioning makes the product accessible and relatable, fostering comfort and warmth without creating a sense of exclusion. Such angle use is highly persuasive in commercial advertising as it makes viewers feel included and respected. The represented participants the teacup and the product's box are shown at a close social distance, specifically a medium long shot, allowing viewers to see the full product. This distance implies a formal and impersonal relationship between viewers and the product, balancing intimacy and formality. It also facilitates easy observation of details like the amber color of the tea and the full product packaging. While intimate distances tend to be more persuasive by fostering closeness, this formal distance offers a moderate persuasive impact by maintaining a respectful and clear presentation.

Color use in the image is highly saturated, featuring bright purple for the backdrop and product box, golden tones on the cup's rim and logo borders, and amber for the tea. These colors evoke luxury, trustworthiness, and prestige, enhancing the image's naturalistic feel and emotional engagement. This strategy provides high persuasion. The advertiser uses a controlled palette of primary colors (purple, gold, amber, and white) to avoid

distracting viewers and to form cultural connections purple symbolizing luxury and loyalty, gold representing quality and prestige in Western cultures. This selective color differentiation provides medium modality but strong persuasion by keeping focus on the product and emotionally engaging the viewers. Color modulation includes varied shades and tones, such as darker purple on the box and lighter purple in the background, with subtle shading on the teacup adding a lifelike dimension. Some elements, like the brand logo, are flat-colored, resulting in moderate naturalism and persuasion. The background features a semi-naturalistic landscape with mountains, tea fields, and Darjeeling tea leaves, providing geographical context that connects the product to nature, heritage, and tradition. Though stylized, this background supports trust-building without overwhelming the viewer, maintaining medium modality and persuasive effectiveness. The image balances naturalistic and abstract representations: the teacup and box are realistic, building trust by showing the actual product's appearance, which influences buying attitudes. The semi-naturalistic background slightly lowers modality but remains persuasive by focusing attention on the product. In regards to illumination, Lighting is soft and gently shaded, highlighting the teacup and saucer to suggest luxury and quality without harsh reflections that might tire viewers. This subtle illumination offers medium modality and persuasion, enhancing visual clarity and comfort. Balanced brightness further grabs viewers' interest and desire toward the product. This subtle use of brightness is perfect for grabbing the interest, desire, and attention of viewers toward the product (Darjeeling Tea). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), moderate use of brightness provides medium persuasion and realism to the image.

### C. Compositional Meaning Analysis

The image places the visual elements in distinctive layout positions; they are mostly placed at the top/bottom and center/margins. The brand's logo, "Twinings of London," is positioned at the top, suggesting an ideal and traditional message. It is also used to introduce the brand's identity and heritage, as it comes with the word "London." The advertiser indirectly wants to tell audiences that Twinings is an ideal and prestigious British brand that perfectly matches their ideal taste and desire. On the other hand, the teacup and the product's box are placed at the bottom, suggesting real or actual information. This positioning is used to reinforce sensory and physical realities since the product is fully shown to viewers, assisting them in understanding what the actual product offers. This layout positioning is remarkably persuasive, as it leads viewers' eyes from ideal information what they most desire at the top to the real information offered at the bottom. It also

builds viewers' trust by reinforcing the brand's heritage, authenticity, and tradition.

Moreover, both the brand's logo and the teacup also occupy the center of the image, implying that they are the most important messages presented to viewers. This central positioning is extremely manipulative in commercial advertising like "Twinings of London," as it makes the product the center of attention and directly leads viewers' eyes to the product, immediately influencing purchasing behavior. The image's backdrop (mountains and tea fields) is margined, suggesting less important information. Importantly, the top/bottom positioning provides a stronger persuasive impact than center/margins positioning. Furthermore, the image utilizes an integration of connected and disconnected frames. The brand's logo is framed, suggesting distinction and tradition. The teacup and box are unframed and blended with the landscape, reinforcing authenticity and emotional appeal.

In terms of salience, the brand's logo and the teacup with the amber-like saucer are the most salient visual elements due to their prominent sizes, high color contrasts, and foreground placements. The brand's logo is presented in a prominently large size, and its bright golden borders are highly contrasted with Twinings' black font and its white and golden background. The teacup, on the other hand, is shown in a perfectly large size and presented centrally, making it the second most prominent visual element. Additionally, its golden rims are perfectly contrasted with the amber-like saucer and purple background. Their larger sizes, high color contrast, and placements make them the center of attention, directly capturing the viewers' eyes. The tea box and mountainous landscape are less prominent compared to the other elements. This thoughtful use of salience provides high persuasion to the image, as it represents the brand and product in perfectly large size, high color contrasts, and strategic placements.

As a final point, Figure (2) employs nineteen elements, of which eighteen are visual and one is textual or rhetorical. The billboard is remarkably persuasive, as it comprises twelve visual and one rhetorical element with high persuasion and six visual elements with medium persuasion. More importantly, the researcher has not detected any visual or rhetorical elements with low persuasion.



Figure.3 (McDonald’s Advertising Billboard) (Received from <https://in.pinterest.com/>)

Table5  
Analysis of McDonald’s Billboard Advertisement

		Detection	Persuasion Impact Level										
			Low	Medium	High								
Linguistic Analysis	Rhetorical Analysis	Formal Scheme											
		Parallelim											
		Antithesis											
		Parody	✓		✓								
		Metaphor	✓		✓								
		Hyperbole	✓		✓								
		Prosopopeia	✓		✓								
		Neologism											
		Rhetorical Question											
		Parataxis											
Linguistic Analysis	Phonological Scheme	Direct Address	✓		✓								
		Rhyme											
		Alliteration											
		Puns											
		Rhetorical – Visual Integration	Visual Analysis	Visual Structures of the Images	Representational Meaning	Conceptual Processes	Classification Process						
						Analytic Process	✓		✓				
						Symbolic Process	✓		✓				
					Rhetorical – Visual Integration	Visual Analysis	Visual Structures of the Images	Interactive Meaning	Narrative Process	Contact	Demand Gaze		
										Offer Gaze	✓		
										Angle	Horizontal	✓	
Vertical	✓									✓			
Social Distance	Intimate Distance												
	Close Personal Distance								✓				
	Far Personal Distance												
	Close Social Distance												
	Far Social Distance												
	Public Distance												
	Modality	Color saturation	✓		✓								
Color Differentiation	✓		✓										
Color modulation	✓		✓										
Contextualization	✓		✓										
Depth Representation	✓		✓										
Illumination	✓		✓										
Brightness	✓		✓										
Compositional Meaning	Framing	Information Value	Right/Left	✓		✓							
			Center/ Margin	✓		✓							
			Top/Bottom	✓		✓							
			Connected	✓		✓							
			Disconnected										
			Saliency	✓		✓							
			Overall Results	High in persuasion									

**1. Linguistic Analysis**

Figure (3) contains a very close-up shot of a large-sized and crispy chicken burger, clearly showing its ingredients

placed against a bright red background. It also features the vivid golden brand logo and the slogan “I’m lovin’ it” at the bottom. The image comprises two texts: the main text “Please do not eat the billboard” and the additional

text “All white meat chicken.” The main text consists of three rhetorical figures: parody, metaphor, and direct address. It is a parody because it humorously mimics the official style of warning signs like “Please do not smoke here.” The advertiser employs parody to make the billboard entertaining and enjoyable. It is also used to increase the memorability of the textual message and the billboard, as it can easily stick in the viewer’s mind due to its entertaining and extraordinary nature. This approach is exceedingly persuasive in commercial ads like McDonald’s, as such food brands often target younger and teenage consumers more than adults. It can effortlessly persuade them to purchase the product—in this case, a crispy white meat chicken burger. Additionally, this persuasion is achieved by emotionally engaging and entertaining the viewers through humorously imitating culturally familiar language styles such as warning signs.

The text is indirectly comparing the billboard to the food. The phrase “eat the billboard” is metaphorically used, as no one can literally eat a billboard. The advertiser is indirectly implying that “our crispy white meat chicken looks so tasty and drool-worthy that it makes you want to eat the billboard.” This is again a persuasive and manipulative strategy, as it emotionally and cognitively engages the viewers and prompts them to visualize eating the advertised product.

However, the text does not contain any personal pronouns (you and your), but the imperative “please do not” is indirectly addressing and engaging the viewers. This strategy provides medium persuasion for the product and brand, as it engages the viewers but does not directly persuade them to purchase the product.

Nonetheless, the additional text “All white meat chicken” comprises two rhetorical figures: prosopopoeia and hyperbole. It is prosopopoeia because the text is an elliptical form of “It is all white meat chicken.” The sentence omits grammatical elements such as the pronoun “it” and the auxiliary “is” to imitate casual and everyday conversational styles. This simplicity and casualness in language structure make the viewers feel close to and warm toward the product; it also makes the product appear more trustworthy. Prosopopoeia provides high persuasion to the billboard, as it makes the message shorter, simpler, and more digestible.

In addition, the word “all” is an example of absolute language that is rarely used in everyday interactions, claiming that the product is 100% white meat. The use of absolute language like “all” is an example of hyperbole, as it exaggerates the quality of the product. The advertiser intentionally employs hyperbole to indirectly compare McDonald’s white meat chicken burger to those of other food brands, claiming that it is superior because it uses 100% pure white meat. This claim is incredibly persuasive to consumers who are concerned about their health and

do not eat darker meats. Both texts follow the formal schemes of rhetorical figures. The advertiser purposefully follows these formal structures to make the messages grammatically and structurally shorter, simpler, and more comprehensive.

## 2. Visual Analysis

### A. Representational Meaning Analysis

Figure (3) does not show any actions or interactions among represented participants; they are in static positions, making the image fully conceptual rather than narrative. The image relies on symbolic and analytical conceptual processes to convey meaning and major messages. The crispy white meat chicken burger is the main represented participant (carrier), and it is described via symbolic attributes, such as the burger’s ingredients. These symbolic attributes are used to define the product’s identity as McDonald’s and reflect its quality and authenticity. For example, the fresh tomato slice and lettuce symbolize freshness, trustworthiness, and the quality of McDonald’s. The perfectly toasted soft buns and crispy white meat patty symbolize the high quality of the brand. Additionally, the burger itself symbolizes perfection, satisfaction, and desire.

The advertiser purposefully shows the product’s layers to make the product appear trustworthy and transparent, as the viewers can clearly see its components and what they are being offered. This strategy is remarkably persuasive in food commercials, as it builds the viewers’ trust and interest in the product by visually displaying what they will receive. Moreover, the product is explained through a whole-part relationship, categorically showing the burger’s layers (the chicken patty, lettuce, tomato, buns, and the white sauce, perhaps mayonnaise). This whole-part structure visually explains what the product contains and what the viewer will receive upon purchasing it. This careful construction of a whole-part relationship is ultimately persuasive, as it provokes the viewers’ desire and interest by presenting a delicious and perfect example of the product.

### B. Interactive Meaning Analysis

The contact in the image suggests an offer type, as there are no human participants with direct gazes. Viewers are invited to observe and visually evaluate the product and its layers rather than being demanded to interact. The advertiser uses an offer to make the product the center of attention, keeping the viewer’s focus and evoking desire and satisfaction. Offer-type contact is more effective in food commercials as it maintains viewer attention and provides high persuasive power. The image is captured horizontally from a frontal perspective, suggesting ultimate engagement between represented participants and viewers. It engages viewers to experience the white meat chicken burger and represents equality, implying they belong to the same world. This makes the product approachable and attainable,

suggesting it is for everyone. The frontal perspective enhances persuasive impact by including viewers in the experience. The vertical representation at eye level further implies equality between the product and viewers, reinforcing the message of inclusiveness and social equality. This makes viewers feel connected and comfortable with the product. The image is a close-up shot of the burger, indicating close personal distance between the product and viewers. This allows clear observation of the product and its components, evoking sensory connections like taste or smell. The advertiser's use of close distance fosters inclusion and mutual connection. This social distance is highly effective in food advertising and offers strong persuasive power to the billboard.

The image employs highly saturated colors: the bright red background and sliced tomato, the golden-brown meat patty, the vibrant green lettuce, and the plain white sauce. This careful use of saturation makes the product and its components appear real and vivid without exaggeration. It presents the product as it appears in real life, appealing to the viewer's appetite and sensory responses. It enhances the image's modality and realism, making it highly persuasive. Additionally, a wide range of color differentiation is used red, white, green, and golden-brown which allow viewers to clearly distinguish the product's components and separate the product from the red background. This color variation boosts both modality and persuasion. The image also includes well-balanced modulation of shades and shadows. For example, the buns and patty feature gradients from darker golden-brown to lighter golden-yellow. The lettuce is shown in varied green shades, making it appear fresh and lively. Overall, the product is well shaded, indicating high realism and modality. This subtle use of shading and shadowing is highly persuasive and immediately grabs viewer attention.

The background is minimalistic, consisting solely of bright red, reflecting McDonald's brand identity. Though lacking in environmental realism, this approach keeps focus on the product and avoids distractions. The representation is naturalistic, clearly displaying the product's textures and layers. There are no abstract elements; everything appears realistic and vivid. This naturalism evokes viewer desire and curiosity, making the image highly persuasive and high in modality.

Moreover, the image uses naturalistic lighting, contributing to its realism. The soft light reflecting on the tomato slices and bacon makes them appear fresh and dimensional. It helps the product stand out against the bright background and captures viewer attention. This lighting provides both high modality and persuasive power. Regarding brightness, the contrast is well-managed between the product and the red backdrop. The subtle brightness variations among product layers make

it easier for viewers to differentiate them. The image is well-lit and visible from a distance, increasing its modality and persuasiveness by making the burger appear even more appetizing.

### **C. Compositional Meaning Analysis**

The visual elements in the image are strategically placed, suggesting different meanings and roles. For example, the chicken burger is positioned on the right side, presenting it as new or important information. This invites viewers to focus fully on the product. Conversely, the left side is occupied by the McDonald's golden logo, suggesting given or familiar information. It implies that the audience is already familiar with McDonald's as a globally recognized brand. This placement is highly persuasive, as it introduces the advertised product as a new and important addition. It structurally leads the viewer's eye from left (the familiar, trustworthy brand) to right (the new chicken burger). The main text, "Please do not eat the billboard," is centrally placed, making it the core message and immediately capturing viewer attention. The advertiser purposely centered the text to humorously engage the audience and draw attention to the appetizing product. This strategy is extremely persuasive, influencing viewer buying behavior by sparking curiosity and desire. Additional texts, "I'm lovin' it" and "All white meat chicken," are placed at the bottom, implying real information. "I'm lovin' it" evokes positive emotions like joy, comfort, and satisfaction, while "All white meat chicken" builds trust by providing factual brand identity. It reassures viewers that McDonald's offers high-quality, pure white meat. This positioning is persuasive, reinforcing brand authenticity and quality.

All visual elements are connected through the vibrant red background, suggesting unity and cohesion. The product, text, and logo are visually linked; the humorous message directly refers to the mouthwatering burger. There are no borders, frames, or inconsistent fonts to break this cohesion. This unity encourages viewers to see the components as one cohesive message. The advertiser avoids confusion by preventing unnecessary visual disconnection. Every element reinforces the message: "This white meat chicken burger is so delicious; you might want to eat the billboard." This thought connection provides exceptionally high persuasion and boosts message memorability. In terms of salience, the most attention-grabbing elements are the chicken burger, the main text, and the brand logo. The burger is the largest and contrasts strongly with the red background. The white-colored main text is centrally placed and large in size, creating powerful contrast and making it the second most salient element. Although the logo is smaller, its distinct font, golden color, and position at the bottom make it the third most noticeable element. The additional text is the least salient.

All in all, Figure (3) employs twenty-three elements: eighteen visual and five rhetorical. McDonald's billboard is ultimately persuasive, effective, and subtly manipulative, as all twenty-three elements demonstrate high persuasive power with no detection of medium or low persuasive elements.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the two billboards demonstrates how designers utilize both visual and rhetorical strategies to persuade viewers regarding the promoted products. Both billboards heavily rely on these strategies to enhance their persuasive impact. This finding supports the notion that advertising is a multimodal rather than a mono-modal form of discourse, as it integrates both visual and rhetorical elements to appeal to audiences.

Additionally, the analysis reveals that the billboards employ various rhetorical figures such as metaphor, hyperbole, and prosopoeia which significantly enhance their persuasive effect. These rhetorical figures align with the formal schemes of Leech's (1966) rhetorical classifications rather than phonological schemes. This structured use of rhetorical figures contributes to the clarity and coherence of the billboard texts, making them more digestible and comprehensible for viewers. This is supported by Xing and Feng (2023), who acknowledge the idea that rhetorical figures enhance clarity and audience engagement. The use of formal rhetorical schemes proves highly effective, as it enables the textual message to be short, concise, and clear quickly capturing the viewer's attention, evoking desire, and building trust. This approach aligns seamlessly with the core objectives of commercial billboard advertising.

Both billboards strategically integrate distinct visual elements to amplify the persuasive appeal of the products. They utilize all three structures of visual meaning representational, interactive, and compositional as outlined in Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) Visual Grammar. The analysis indicates that both billboards primarily rely on conceptual processes, especially symbolic and analytical processes, rather than narrative ones, to establish the identity and meaning of the represented participants. The represented participants are depicted statically, without engaging in any actions or events. Instead, symbolic attributes are employed to represent the products as trustworthy, high-quality, authentic, and fresh. This strategic use of conceptual representation is particularly persuasive in commercial advertisements, as it effortlessly captures the viewer's attention and desire, making the products appear more appealing and mouthwatering. This finding is in line with Zakirullah et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of static, symbolic representations in constructing product meanings that evoke trust and desire.

Moreover, both billboards exclude human endorsements with direct gazes, presenting the image as an offer rather than a demand. This absence of human figures is especially persuasive in commercial advertisements like Twinings and McDonald's, as it centers the viewer's attention solely on the product, avoiding distractions from human models. Both images are captured from a horizontal, frontal, eye-level perspective, suggesting a sense of involvement and equality between the represented and interactive participants. The analysis also reveals variations in social distance: for instance, the McDonald's billboard uses a more intimate distance, which enhances its persuasive and emotional appeal, whereas the Twinings billboard presents the product from a more formal and impersonal distance.

Furthermore, both billboards incorporate various modality markers and represent the products naturalistically and realistically. The use of naturalistic color schemes, brightness, and detailed representations suggests high modality, which helps to trigger viewers' sensory engagement and emotional connection, potentially influencing their purchasing behavior. Nasakina (2024) also discussed how naturalistic and realistic representations in pharmaceutical ads (a commercial context) increase modality and thereby the persuasive effectiveness by fostering emotional connection and trust.

The represented participants (i.e., the products) and the accompanying textual messages are both centrally positioned, highlighting their importance. This central placement is found to be highly persuasive, as it immediately captures the viewer's attention and focuses their desire directly on the product or message.

Additionally, the analysis shows that the visual elements in both billboards are deliberately connected, forming a unified composition. This connected framing avoids unnecessary distractions and prolongs the viewer's engagement with the billboard, making it more effective. This finding aligns with Yang (2019), who highlights the role of unified multimodal composition in prolonging viewer engagement and enhancing persuasive impact. The products and messages are also displayed in large sizes, placed in the foreground, and contrasted with different colors to make them the most salient and attention-grabbing elements. In conclusion, the findings of the analysis indicate that both billboards are highly persuasive and strategic in influencing audiences' beliefs, desires, and purchasing behaviors.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The current study aims to explore the use of multimodal strategies in commercial billboards, specifically those of McDonald's and Twinings, to

understand how both visual and rhetorical elements are employed to persuade viewers regarding the advertised products. The findings indicate that the selected billboards strategically integrate visual and rhetorical elements to effectively influence their target audiences. This supports the notion that advertising discourse is inherently multimodal, relying on the interplay between verbal and non-verbal modes to construct persuasive messages.

These results underscore the significance of multimodality in commercial advertising, revealing how the careful integration of linguistic and visual elements can shape viewers' attitudes, beliefs, and purchasing behavior. Moreover, the study provides valuable insights into the roles and functions of rhetorical figures in advertisements, demonstrating how persuasion can be enhanced through their thoughtful application. It also contributes to our understanding of visual structures namely representational, interactive, and compositional meanings and illustrates how their combination fosters more effective and engaging multimodal communication.

#### 7. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, the data set is limited to only two commercial billboard advertisements from globally recognized brands: McDonald's and Twinings. Due to time constraints, additional data from other commercial brands could not be included, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the study focuses exclusively on billboard advertisements, excluding other types of commercial ads that may also employ rich multimodal persuasive strategies.

In light of these limitations, future research is encouraged to expand the scope by analyzing a larger and more diverse corpus of commercial advertisements from a variety of English-language brands. Future studies should also consider examining other forms of commercial advertising such as those found on social media platforms, television, and print media to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how multimodal strategies operate across different advertising contexts.

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