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**ADAPTATION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR COMMUNICATION: A SEMIOTIC
ANALYSIS OF SELECT FUNKE AKINDELE'S PICTURES**

Abstract

Communication in recent times has been laced with tastes of technological innovations that consequently have subjected the entire world to a global village. At the tip of our finger, we can communicate with anyone, display our images to people around the world. Instant posting of pictures with the aid of apps like whatsapp, facebook messenger, instagram etc. have made it easy for individuals to express their feelings and thoughts to the global community. This paper sets out to show how a celebrity like Funke Akindele-Bello reveals her thoughts through pictures on her instagram. Communicating through the use of signs and symbols, sharing pictures are some of the interesting aspects of meaning making. This paper therefore investigates how instagram as a social media application and the use of emoji as a social media feature contribute to how people to make, manage and share meanings across social practices. . There are various modes of communication on instagram which is used to create various signs: pictures, emoticons, multimodal messages, videos etc. all these are ways of creating meaning or creating an avenue where meaning can be analyzed. 4 pictures were taken from Funke Akindele's instagram wall as data, analysed and explained from a semiotic perspective.. Particularly, the focus is on how we understand the world around us through images and analyzed from a semiotic perspective. It concludes that digital communication has become a global platform where youth express their world coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Semiotics, instagram, signs, symbols, social media.

Introduction

Facebook, whatsapp, twitter, instagram are the most common social media messengers and chat platforms where users can receive messages from one another within the shortest possible time and also, these applications make it possible for users to display their photos so as to be able to identify the user. All these are aspects of computer mediated discourse because it deals with communication on a computer basically through text. As a result of rapid use of these applications and the need for pictures to be displayed, a new acronym emerged; DP known as

display picture which is usually displayed on the profile of the person using a particular social media account.

As a result of these social media applications, various words have emerged and existing words have taken up extended meaning. 20 years ago, if anyone had talked about a wall, I would have thought it was the wall of a house or a fence but on social media, it simply means a user's space such that when they post anything it appears on their wall and when someone posts something and another user is tagged, it also appears on the tagged user's wall. In a related view, (Rahayu, 2015) opines that meaning is not a simple belief as a language reproduction, rather, it is a social conflict and struggle which aims at winning a discourse.

Linguistic properties vary depending on the kind of messaging system used, the social and cultural context embedding particular instances of use. However, all such forms have in common that the activity that takes place through them is constituted primarily in many cases, exclusively by visually-presented language. These characteristics of the medium have important consequences for understanding the nature of computer-mediated language. They also provide a unique environment, free from competing influences from other channels of communication and from physical context, in which to study verbal interaction and the relationship between discourse and social practice. Computer mediated discourse features in social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram etc. with Instagram being the major focus in this paper.

INSTAGRAM

Instagram is a social media application which allows users to share photos and videos. It was launched on October 6, 2010 by Facebook. The application can only be used on an Android phone just like many other applications in use today. Instagram is similar to Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp as they all share photos and videos but each has its own unique features. As for Instagram, there must be a photo before an individual can post anything on the platform. Individuals who have an account in any of these platforms will have a profile where basic information is found and a profile picture of the person.

The mobile phone has many capabilities which made them a smart gadget equipped with high resolution cameras. On the other hand, it has access to internet and by which you can get access to instagram. These capacities provide users the ability to generate pictorial messages. Besides, the picture user can make a multimodal sign by adding written text beside the pictures and add the location tag specifying where the picture is taken. The history of the posted picture is kept on your account and the social network community can interact through sending comment on it or assign a “like mark” which is usually generated by a double tap and produces a red love image. On instagram, the salient mode of communication is visual mode and there are many editing tools to adjust sharpness, saturation, contrast and crop the pictures, adding filters. The text part is attached in beneath of the picture. Another important message mode of instagram is video posts. All these mode of message carries a like tag which shows the number of the like feedback from the viewers. On the other hand all the multimodal post accompanies the textual comment part by which the viewer can describe their interpretation of sign or use for enrichment of the post meaning.

SEMIOTICS

Often times, when we upload a picture online, we are indirectly communicating a message. Every image, picture, sign or symbol have a message to pass across.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, in particular, as they communicate things spoken and unspoken. Common examples of semiotic materials include traffic signs, pictures, emojis and emoticons used in electronic communication, and logos used by companies to sell their products. Semiotics emanated from the works of a Swiss linguist named Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). He described a sign as any motion, gesture, image, pattern, or event that conveys meaning. A sign is something that is used in place of something else.

Saussure, in his view posits that the sign may be broken down into the signifier and the signified. Traffic signals are simple examples to explain the concept of semiotics. The three main signifiers for traffic signals are colours: green, yellow and red. These signifiers use only one of the five

senses which is sight so when we see the different colours of the traffic light, we automatically know how to react to them without even thinking about them. Semiotics is also said to be the study of meaning. It looks at how we attach meaning to the real world, images, words and sounds and it is argued by Ferdinand de Saussure that written and visual language is a system of signs, which is divided into two parts; A signifier and Signified. The signifier is the form of the message while the signified is what the message is saying, so in photography, the signifier is the image/photograph that we see that is easily recognisable and the signified is the concept of the signifier and what it represents. Swiss linguist Saussure version of Semiotics studies focuses on the cultural construction of meaning, which basically doesn't give us a formal way of describing how things take place.

VISUAL SEMIOTICS

Visuality is one of the easiest perception ways; we learn 83% of what we learn through seeing (Sonmez, 2005:122). So the images we see contributes in tremendous ways to how we learn.

Visual semiotics is a new branch of the field of semiotics originating in 1990's- and has been defined by Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) in their book, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, "We intend to provide inventories of the major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of visual semiotics, and to analyze how they are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers." (1). Because meanings are not given, but constructed. The sign is the key term in any semiotics study. A sign is simply anything that stands for something else and has communicative implication(s).

Visual semiotics emphasizes the ways visuals communicate and the system dominating their usage. It is simply dealing with what we can see and being able to communicate with the visual image at hand. Nevertheless, semiotics predominantly enquires into the ways through which the meaning is created rather than simply investigating what it is. Human being has always wanted to understand and interpret the world he lives in. He desires to get to know, and *read*, the nature, the universe, human being and his culture, which is why he needs to think about and analyze their meanings. The meaning doesn't necessarily come out obviously, it often exists latently and waits to be disclosed, analyzed and read (Parsa & Parsa, 2002: 79).

Recently, making meaning and shearing information through images mostly on the net has taken a supreme position over texts, cinemas, newspapers, magazines, books, posters, computer screens, television screens, clothes and even restaurant menus have been enclosed with images as it has never been before. COVID-19 has robbed greatly on the mode thorough which people express themselves. People are much more comfortable with what they see as images attract more audience on social media than ordinary text. Obviously, an emphasis on visual messages does not mean that words are less important than images. The most powerful and meaningful messages are combined with words and pictures equally (Lester, 2000: x). Considering the rapid developments in technology, we come face to face with an era widely dominated visually.

Similarly, Lester (2000) sees the concept of sign as being very important because almost any action, object or image means something to someone somewhere. Any physical representation is a sign if it has meaning beyond the object itself.” Consequently, the meaning behind any sign must be learned. And also Umberto Eco stressed, “Signs are correlated with what they stand for on the basis of a rule or a convention” (Eco, 1985:196). Apparently, when we are able to read a particular sign or interpret it in a particular way, then there must have been a rule or an agreement to associate it with a particular meaning. Thus, if signs which are understood by the receiver or reader are used in any media channel, images will be much more memorable and interesting especially in areas of advertising.

Framework: Semiotic of Pictures

Social media provides people with digital environments of preselected semiotic resources and more abstract semiotic principles for carrying out social and semiotic work, thereby contributing to shaping how we make, enact, and manage meaning in social practice (Volosinov 1973[1929]). This explains that every sign whatsoever, be it spoken or written and in visual form holds a vast amount of meaning to be deduced by the reader or receiver. Basically, how are we able to connect the lines especially when we are dealing with instagram; a platform that is characterized by 80% of images.

In the field of semiotics, every picture is communicating a message and also the individual that posted the picture has an intention. This tells us that every image is actually saying something

which is not verbally stated, although, there are some posts with captions which accompanies a photo that make it easy for us to understand the message from a sender so as to be acquainted with the state of affairs of the person. The feature of photos accompanied with text, together with audio, video explains that aspect of **multimodality** of Instagram. The followers of an individual are all able to see what the person posts then they can make comments about the pictures. Accompanied with some comments and posts are **emojis** which can be used to show mood and emotion of a person.

A sign can be a word, a sound, or a visual image. Saussure (1985) divides linguistic signs into two components--the signifier (the sound, image, or word) and the signified, which is the concept the signifier represents, or the meaning. Also, Seiter (2011) posits that in photography, the photo itself is the signifier; the signified is what the image is or represents. As Berger (1990) points out, the problem of meaning arises from the fact that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional. In other words, signs can mean anything, and they can mean different things to different people. The arbitrariness is true in most written and spoken language; however it is clear that visual signs are not arbitrary

These images we see everyday are not universal in the sense that they are not interpreted the same in every language. Emphasis should be made on the cultural interpretation of signs because what entails in a particular culture is different from another culture so the same concept can be interpreted differently by different cultures. Whenever an image contains a caption in English, it is relatively easy to argue that it represents part of the English language. When there is no text present the argument is not quite as clear-cut, but Barthes argues that any reading of an image is dependent on the reader's cultural and linguistic knowledge (Barthes 1977:29). In other words, an image read by an English-speaking person might not be interpreted the same way as the same image read by a French-speaking person.

Today, a lot of people both young and old want to display their pictures online and receive beautiful comments. People go at the pace of taking a shot every new day and since phones come with front cameras, it makes it easier to take a **selfie**: a photo taken by one. We see pictures everywhere showing our activities, places we visit and bulk of many other things we are doing at the moment and in fact, Instagram is dedicated to posting our pictures. This is the reason Werner

Walter claims that post-modern society has been characterized by its “relentless traffic in images” (2004:64).

A SOCIAL-SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PICTURES FROM FUNKE AKINDELE’S WALL ON INSTAGRAM

In (mediated) communication, signs are made and remade, and from a social semiotic perspective, signs are always newly made in a specific environment and according to the interests of the sign makers. In other words, “Signs are made and the major type of sign on instagram is the Pictures captured by the user’s mobile phones which is edited and uploaded by sign maker who can add some description text beneath that picture. The sign which is made in this way will be saved in profile history of the sign maker on instagram and therefore he would have a collection of signs he had shared. These signs have the memorable feature of contemporary pictures. On the other hand after composing a post on instagram, It would be forwarded to sign maker’s followers and they can make feedback by writing comment and making like on the post. In fact, the world is surrounded with mediated images such that we hardly come across an online message without an image. According to 2015 statistics, instagram users have shared over 40 billion photos and share an average of 95 million photos per day, therefore, there are over 40 billion signs to be deciphered on this application.

The youth are the largest users of the instagram application and so many are always eager to display pictures of their daily events. Before the availability of camera phones, people usually take photos on special or rare occasions but today, the story has changed, we see bulk of photos from just one person in a day and because instagram is solely dedicated to pictures. In a world Surrounded with symbols, images and various signs, human being has always strived to signify them and utilized for communication. The meaning comes out of an interaction between the message and its reader (audience).

First, the parameters for any analysis of an image is basically talking about what is visibly present in the image (signifier) and what the suggested meaning are (signified), the surface meaning (connotation) and the suggested meaning(denotation). The following pictures are screenshots randomly and selected from Funke Akindele’s wall.

PICTURE 1



At this juncture, it has to be noted that all pictures for this analysis do not mean that we are looking at the actress in actual sense but what we have here is a representation of Funke Akindele and therefore, we are looking at signs. Ordinarily, with the picture, we are faced with an elated person from her pose and her smiles. The signifier is the picture while the signified is message the picture is passing across. Signs are both *denotative* and *connotative* and so in semiotics, *denotation* and *connotation* are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and its signified, and an analytic distinction is made between two types of signifieds: a *denotative* signified and a *connotative* signified (Chandler 2002). Meaning includes both denotation and connotation. In photography, the denoted meaning is conveyed through the digital or mechanical reproduction of the image: a dog is a dog. Connotation is the result of human intervention such as camera, angle, focus, color, lighting, depth-of-field, special effects, etc. (Tomaselli, 1996:31). As also very well known Fiske puts it 'denotation is what is photographed, connotation is how it is photographed' (Fiske, 1982: 91).

Obviously, the denotation of the image above is simply the image of Funke Akindele. The connotation is what we see when we look deeply at the picture. We see all shades of smile, a beautiful face, a pose that looks like she is dancing and a gorgeous outfit. This means that she is

very happy about something or she is celebrating something and the caption has made it easier as the best form of communication recently is an image with a caption. The caption are hashtags and an “emoji” which will be discussed later in this paper which reads thus #thankful, #blessed, #thankyoulord, #happybirthdaytome, #funkeakindelebello. She celebrates her birthday in the picture and wants people to wish her well. Also, we cannot fail to talk about the fact that certain camera effects have been added to the picture to make it look beautiful and exert plenty likes together with beautiful comments. Or what is the main aim of displaying a picture if it’s not to receive good comments from people?

PICTURE 2



This is another picture which obviously displays all shades of radiance; from her dress, to her hair and to her smile. Many people pick fashion inspiration on Instagram trying to find out latest fashion trends, nice styles to sew and even a very good fashion designer who can make the clothes. From her caption, we are able to understand that she is trying to sell somebody as she wrote ‘@tinnahsplacempire nailed it’ which simply means tinnahsplacempire made the dress. She also used emojis to sell two other people; the second person tagged @zainabazeez with the emoji of a lipstick simple means she did Funke’s makeup while the @bernardsmiles with the icon of a female with hair packed to the front side could mean where she bought her hair.

From the picture, she is apparently selling attraction and flaunting her beauty, her clothes, her hair e.t.c. The signifier then is just the image of Funke Akindele above, on the part of the signified, there is more to the picture; she wants to show off the beautiful clothes and how it fits perfectly on her. She also wants her followers to patronize the three people tagged in the post. When you tag a person on instagram, you want your followers to know about the person, what he/she does, follow the person, check out his/her business page and even patronize the person. The word *tag* adds a label or a mark to something but on instagram, it means attaching a person's name so that all your followers can see and also the person receives a notification of the 'tag' as soon as they come online. This illustrates one of the important features of words taking up another meaning on instagram. For instance, the word 'wall' is a structure built around a place for defense or the wall of a house but on social media, a wall is a place that displays a person's profile and their activities and activities of people who tag them in their post

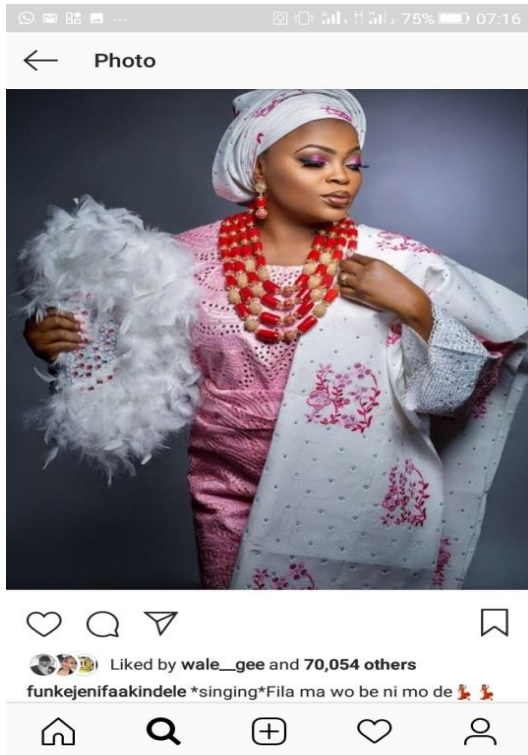
| Signifier | Signified |
|---|--|
| A beautiful and smiling face with a beautiful dress. | She is showing off her beauty and how the dress fits her |
| The tagged names e.g @tiannahsplacempire | These names are tagged for her followers so see so that they can patronize them. |
| The emojis used e.g the smiley with a love icon on the mouth. | This shows that she absolutely loves the dress. |

PICTURE 3.



The picture above is beautiful and cool with a very light smile. With this picture, we can say that some days, users of Instagram just want to celebrate what is happening at the moment. For instance, the picture was posted on the 14 of February 2018 and the caption reads “Happy Valentine’s day” to mark the valentine celebration. The caption “Happy Valentine’s day” is a text based semiotic system and from our knowledge of the history of valentine, she is celebrating a season of love. One of the meanings associated with colour black which is the colour of her outfit is “elegance” to show that she is elegantly dressed for this particular season and her warm red earrings in this context is “love”. The bulk of the reasons people display their pictures online is to celebrate moments like birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, graduation etc.

PICTURE 4.



Some pictures are best interpreted through the knowledge of the culture of a people. We are able to interpret some signs when we know what is obtainable in a particular culture. The outfit in the image above is complete traditional attire and this is mostly used when a person is getting married or the person is attending a very important and elaborate function. If a lady of the marriage age range uploads this picture on any social media platform, it will be immediately assumed that she is getting married as such, this notion will be correct because this is obtainable in the Yoruba culture in which many other cultures are also imitating. The signifier is simple the picture of Funke Akindele in a beautiful attire but the signified is in what kind of attire is she putting on, the meaning is deduced from the kind of attire she is putting on based on our knowledge of cultural practices. Considering the fact that Funke Akindele is a popular actress, it might not even be that she is getting married in real life but getting married in one of her movies.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PICTURES AND COMMENTS ON INSTAGRAM

Comments on social media are responses or reactions to a particular post be it pictures or textual communication. Although, all of Instagram posts come with a picture and every follower has the opportunity to make comments. Of course, it is only when the viewer understands the image that he/she is able to make comments and appropriate comments that suits the picture. Virtually

all the comments that for the pictures in the analysis match the image: beautiful comments for beautiful pictures. Sometimes, pictures come with a caption. A caption (textual sign) makes it easy to relate and interact with the picture so with or without a caption, how are post better understood through other users comments.

Many people post pictures for fun and the aim is to flaunt their beauty. A gorgeously dressed photo receives comments like beautiful, fabulous, I love you, pretty, incredible and emojis like love icon, face throwing a kiss, fire icon etc. Judging from the pictures used for this analysis, there are no less than 5000 comments on each. Most of the comments are commending the poster's appearance. For instance, the second picture was liked by 155, 109 persons and received 1581 comments. Some of the comments goes thus:

Jiddaharman looking elegant and feminine.

Strafoxclean Gorgeous

limababy001 if nor be u nah who else.....u are true definition of a slay QUEEN.

Joyce.cudjoe you rock!

Shania_867 cute

kiki_mandy115 you look so beautiful

preciouspearlnanayaa looking fabulous

jullietchisom so sweet

takyiednagrace nyc outfit

etz_splendid beautiful mama

richestmoses wow u are looking sweet

official_precious its glamorous

ajoke2014_new elegant lady **giftcogzy** looking stunning

ohjone1lukin gorgeous 4ever luv u luv wot u wear **mr_diby_kouassi** jenifa c'est pour quand?

LINGUISTIC FEATURES THAT ARE NOTICEABLE ON INSTAGRAM

1. Combinations of letters and numbers E.g b4 for before, 10q for thank you, 9yt for night e.t.c.

2. The use of hashtags: a hash sign together with words which are not spaced. E.g
#NigeriaDecides2019
3. Complete use of emoji or sometimes the combination of emoji and text.
4. Use of slangs to comment on pictures or as captions e.g. too much sauce, slay mama,
5. Use of Acronyms. E.g. WCW (Woman Crush Wednesday), MCM (Man Crush Monday).

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to emphasize that in any of our activities, meanings are paramount aspects; understanding comes as a result of detecting meanings so if signs are not able to create meanings, then the purpose of communication has not been fulfilled. This brings us to the fact that in every of our activities, no matter how minute it is, there is always a message to be deduced and every sign or symbol we see is communicating a message either directly or indirectly. The study has been able to establish that all pictures on instagram have a message and it is the duty of the users to interpret appropriately.

Until now, there has been no offense as regards the type of language on social media. In fact, these platforms provide opportunity to use slangs, pidgins, incorrect constructions, sub-standard forms etc which are not accepted in formal situations. From the analysis, it was discovered that hardly will a comment be written without an emoji accompanied with it and most importantly, the various words which have emerged as a result of modern technologies and many existing ones have taken up extended meanings. Also, the study has been able to establish a link between comments and the pictures and this can only be achieved when meanings are appropriately interpreted.

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