

Chapter 2

Multimodal Communication Practice in Nigeria's Digital Space

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ABSTRACT

For centuries, people have evolved novel ways of making meaning. With the passage of time, the various traditional modes of representation or meaning making have been altered and, in some cases, refined or displaced by technological advancements. In Nigeria, a growing academic interest seeks to explore the practical relevance of integrating semiotic resources, such as speech, writing, video, music, colours, or signs to create multimodal texts across a wide range of communicative acts. This chapter, therefore, examines multimodal communication practice within Nigeria's digital space, its nature, dimension, as well as how digital technologies are appropriated to enhance, not just the people's digital experience, but also create social, economic, and business opportunities for Nigeria's growing population of digital natives.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional modes of representation and meaning making have come under serious challenge since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The era of the “word” as the primary mode of meaning making, for instance, is gradually being replaced in many contemporary societies as a result of the Digital Revolution, which marked the beginning of the Information Age. These developments indicate that “the dominance of monomodality has weakened” (van Leeuwen, 2017, p.4)—not just in terms of research, but also in terms of the diversity of semiotic modes people employ in making meaning or representing ideas.

The written language appears to have lost its dominion to its more aggressive and competitive cousins, such as drawings, photographs, sculptures, paintings, and films. Visual arts, screen-based texts, moving images, or web texts co-occurring with other semiotic resources, such as colours, logos, emblems, or symbols, have gained momentum and are asserting their relevance as means of representation or meaning making. Audio-visuals appearing simultaneously with other semiotic resources have thus created an interesting phenomenon of multimodal communication practice in Nigeria's digital space—a space where anything, including videos, pictures, web texts, or applications (apps) are displayed on the screen of a digital device, namely computers, tablets, iPod, iPad, laptops, smartphones, or e-book readers. In fact, Olateju and Oyeboode (2014) assert that multimodality has “taken over” (p. xxi) from monomodality within the Nigerian socio-cultural contexts as seen in people's increased patronage of richly coloured attires, upholstery, interior decorations, utensils, outdoor décors, among others, intended not only to enhance their physical appearance, but also to convey symbolic meanings and heighten or lower the bar of modality of the semiotic modes.

Multimodal communication is thus being revolutionised by technological advances. As may be noted, computer applications, smartphones, and multimedia tools have made it easier to create multimodal texts. Multimodal texts are texts which combine speech, writing, images, videos, music, prints, colours, symbols, and other multiple simultaneous meaning-making resources. With the adoption of the technological innovations, Nigerian digital users now integrate all forms of semiotic resources to enhance their digital experience in and across different fields, such as education, marketing, advertising, communication, publishing, film-making, graphic design, medicine and health, government and politics, information science, fashion and style, social interactions and events, among others.

Internet-enabled communication platforms have seen the growing use of multimodal communication practice to achieve social, economic, and business objectives as well. Bárcena (2016) observes that, “As digital technologies gradually permeate all activities in our societies, they have an ever-stronger impact on patterns

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