ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Pragmatic Analysis of Visual Message Content used in Centre for Disease Control (CDC) Covid-19 Prevention Infographics

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Abstract

The present study is a qualitative and quantitative research that seeks to pragmatically investigate the visual message content used in the Centre for Disease Control Covid-19 prevention infographics. The theoretical framework is a blend of Austin's Speech Acts to account for visual acts, Serafini's work to account for the salience and Kress and Leeuwen's socio semiotic approach for the explication and description of the observable visual clues. Data was collected purposefully from CDC Covid-19 prevention infographics. The study discovered that out of the five visual acts adapted and adopted for this analysis, visual contents performed three acts comfortably albeit at different categories. The most performed acts are the directive and expressive at 39% respectively. The findings hold that visual contents used in infographics communicate meanings that transcend that which words communicate through the use of models of various genders, social significance, logos, aesthetics and colours. Therefore, just as Austin's Speech Acts, the CDC Covid-19 prevention infographics perform a number of visual acts whose illocutionary forces are to appeal to and change the viewers' mindset, attitude and habits towards the Covid -19 disease.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Speech acts, visual, infographics, covid-19, colours.

Introduction

Language exits as a human attribute and what is conveyed is more often than not a reflection of the environment or resultant from experiences as stimulated by the process of existence in the environment itself. Language can hence be said to reflect the society. It is however important to note that the feat achieved and being achieved by linguists and scholars in describing the linguistic qualities of language in older fields such as grammar, syntax and semantic proved how inadequate the concept of language still is, hence the continuous strife in newer fields of linguistics such as pragmatics and kinesics that can broaden the scope of language.

Coronavirus known as Novel Coronavirus or nCoV according to the World Health Organization (WHO) stands for Coronavirus disease that was discovered in 2019. It comes from a large family of Corona Virus (CoV) and is then officially referred to globally as Covid-19. The virus has become the main topic and attention of the whole world including Nigeria. This virus is unique because in addition to being able to live in inanimate media, it can also replicate in living cells, in addition to being infectious and also deadly. Initially this virus spread out in the province of Wuhan in December 2019 and early 2020; thus, the Chinese government announced it as a deadly virus. As a new and deadly virus, a large outbreak of the disease spread to multiple places in the world including Africa. This prompted the World Health Organisation to declare it a pandemic (Ezekulie & Anosike, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has also become a momentum to increase the concept of good clinical government because the socialization of clinical guidelines in the form of distribution of printed guidelines, presentation of infographics, and visual contents often proves effective. A lot of measures have been put in place for the prevention of this novel virus. In some countries, there have been preventive measures such as imposing lockdown on their territories. However, the impact of lockdown has been seen to affect the fabric of the society, such as hampered economic activities amongst others.

The role of the mass media as one of the agents of socialization is very important in providing good and correct information. The media as one of the

pillars of advertisement and information distribution has a big responsibility to convey information proportionately. One of them is by presenting it with infographics and visual messages: a model of information on the development of covid-19 which is always up to date.

Infographics are a general concept at presenting information in a visually engaging way, which in its application is based on creativity, beauty (attractiveness), accuracy of the content with illustrations and the effectiveness of the same to interpret information. Infographics can simplify complex information into information that can be easily understood and have the ability to attract the attention of various groups of people. Images are used to construct messages which would, if only verbally expressed, sound silly. As Myers (1994, p.136) vividly asserts "we would laugh at the claim that a soap would make anyone beautiful if this claim were put in words, but if it is implied by a picture of a beautiful woman holding the soap, our skeptical faculties are not invoked."

With the outbreak of the global pandemic, media outlets of all kinds have leaned on infographics and visual content to reach the public with vital information such as mode of transmission, prevention, symptoms, etc. and most reputable sources like the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), local hospitals, city municipalities, etc. rely on infographics to spread their messages. These are not just eye-catching as studies have shown that they actually increase audiences' ability to retain important information.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid advancement in science and technology has greatly changed the ways of human communication. We live in an increasingly visual culture, images, colour and other non-verbal resources are no longer used for just entertainment and illustration; rather, they are becoming significant in communicating and meaning-making. Today people are increasingly exposed to texts and adverts that contain elaborate visual images, unusual narrative structures, complex design elements and unique formats (Goldstone, 2004; Kress, 2003; Serafini, 2011). The infographic aspect of advertisement which is the most prominent today has received very little attention from scholars. It is as a result of this that the present study seeks to stimulate and deepen further studies and analysis into the contribution of the visual content in the overall meaning of the infographics used in CDC Covid-19 prevention display.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To establish the importance of the pragmatic roles visual content plays in CDC Covid- 19 prevention infographics.
2. To identify the limitations of words used in the publicity in terms of meaning and how visuals give out more.
3. To examine the pragmatic interpretations that can be inferred from visuals used in Covid -19 prevention infographics.

Review of Previous Studies

A significant number of scholars have contributed to the study of the visual content especially in the field of advertising. One study that comfortably straddles the dual components of advertising – the verbal and visual – is Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) whose interest and linguistic analytical savvy is skewed towards the examination of not only the linguistic characteristics of the language of advertisements but also the content as a whole. Hence, the scope of the study however is centred on the linguistic communication in advertisements and resorts to analysis of the visual aspect only because it is necessary in completing the overall message and rhetoric effect of persuasion that the advertisement seeks to achieve. Vestergaard and Schroder justify their lack of reliance on solely the visual aspect of advertising by alluding to Eco (1976) who says there is no denying that images communicate, but at the same time do not warrant conclusion that images can be analysed in ways analogous to the procedures of analysis applied to the textual means of communication.

Pam and Ezekulie (2019) carried out a pragmatic assessment of the features NigP used to embellish electronic media adverts. The objectives of the study are to accertain the linguistic strategies used in the pidgin adverts to appeal to the socio-cultural, encyclopedic knowledge of the audience; the types of speech acts employed in the adverts to advance the advertisers' discourse goals; and the potential perlocutionary effects induced by the linguistic manipulations in the adverts. The findings reveal that NigP is deliberately manipulated in the adverts using different communication strategies to pursue nationalistic, illocutionary goals and to evoke cultural affinity, which ultimately redound to the desired perlocution of patronage of goods and services. The study concludes that the use of NigP in adverts reflects Nigeria's cultural idiosyncrasies and perculiarities, which is indicative of the inextricable nexus between language and culture. This practice fosters a communal sense of togetherness and national integration which is better interpreted pragmatically as copiously demonstrated.

Oni and Bulus (2019) investigated selected educational billboards in Katsina Metropolis with a view to identifying the different graphic design elements and their meaning. The analysis shows that at the level of textual dimension, font size, font type and colour of the background are given prominence. Plastic dimension consists of construction through shapes, colours, spatial composition and texture. The iconic dimension is considered as the level of recognizing representations of objects and people belonging to the natural world. Linguistic dimensions recognizes coined or compounded meaning given to words that are graphically inscribed to billboards. Context contains those symbolic messages silently being passed across to the general public.

Also, Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2015) conducted a stylistic study of the language of advertising. She argues that the language of advertising is not corrupt usage of language but a deliberate attempt to use specialized expressions to disseminate messages within a limited time and space. Her study revealed that certain word formations are peculiar to the language of advertising. Since time and space are of such importance in billboard advertising, it deploys a lot of short and jerky sentences, positive, comparative and superlative degrees as well as figurative expressions all in a bid to pass information within the shortest available medium and with ease. The analysis presented in this article is thus an important addition to the above body of knowledge.

Theoretical Framework:

This work however seeks to base its analysis on Austin's speech acts which means that language users make utterances in order to perform certain actions (Austin, 1962). Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* prescribed six acts: locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary, phonetic, phatic and rhetic. These were further redefined by Searle (1970) who distinguishes five types of acts performed via speech viz:

Assertives, which include such acts as stating, suggesting, boasting, complaining, claiming and reporting, commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition made.

Directives refer to the speech acts such as commanding, ordering, requesting, advising and recommending, which are aimed at producing some effect in the hearer. The impositives are illocutions such as ordering, asking, demanding and begging.

Commissives commit the speaker to some future actions; these include acts like promising, vowing, offering.

Expressives show the speaker's psychological attitude towards a situation. Such illocutions include thanking, congratulating, pardoning, blaming, praising and condoling while declaratives cause a change of state when uttered by an authorized person. Examples of declaratives are christening, naming, resigning, dismissing, appointing, sentencing and excommunicating. An adaptation of Austin's speech acts to suit visual data being dealt with in this work gave rise to the term "How to do things with visuals" hence visuals are subjected to the same pragmatic yardsticks used for verbal language analysis in order to ascertain how visuals stand up to or transcend the pedigree of words in action.

The framework of analysis proposed for this

study is eclectically based on qualitative and quantitative content analysis and the symbolist approach pioneered in semiology/semiotics by Barthes (1973) and Williamson (1978) by adopting a part of Serafini's (2011) work and Pearson's (2003) view on the role of nonverbal and verbal communication as follows: repetition: when the same message is sent verbally; Emphasis: when nonverbal cues are used to strengthen one's message; Complementation: when the verbal and non-verbal codes add meaning to each other and expand on either message. Contradiction: this occurs when one's verbal and non-verbal message conflict. Substitution occurs when one uses no verbal message at all. Regulation is used to monitor and control interactions with others.

Based on the peculiarity of the data, the researcher has refurbished a blend of the Austin's speech acts to account for visual acts; Serafini's work to account for the salience and design of visuals; Pierson et al.'s role of verbal/ nonverbal to account for the role of visuals in adverts and Kress and Leeuwen's socio-semiotic approach for the explication and description of the observable visual clues. The models were chosen because an integration of relevant parts of such theories will adequately provide a super framework for the analysis of the data collected for this study.

Conceptual clarification:

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with the use of language in social contexts and the ways people produce and comprehend meanings through language. Mey (1993) sees pragmatics not as a science of language in its own right or the science of language as seen and studied by linguists but as the science of language seen in relation with its users; as it is used by real, live people for their own purposes and within their own limitations and affordances. Leech (1985) opines that the pragmatic analysis of language can be understood to be the investigation into the aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words or construction, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered. Simply put, pragmatics is a way of investigating how sense can be made of certain texts even when, from the semantic point of view, the text may seem to be either incomplete or to have a different meaning to what is intended. Verschueren (1999, p.7) characterizes pragmatics as "a general cognitive, social and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior" To him, pragmatics does not constitute an additional component of a theory of language, but offers a different perspective which constitutes a radical departure from the established component view which tries to assign to pragmatics its own set of linguistic features in contradistinction with phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics (Mey, 2001 p.9). According to Levinson (1981), the pragmatic approach to the study of linguistics accounts for what other fields of linguistics whose major preoccupation, being on scientifically analyzable units of language, cannot account for because as knowledge of syntax, phonology and semantics of various language increased, it became clear that there are specific phenomena that can only naturally be described by recourse to contextual concepts.

Perhaps the definition of the concept of pragmatics which suits this research most is the well-known definition by Morris (1958, p.6) which sees pragmatics as "the study of the relation of signs to interpreters." This is so because the focus of this study is to analyse the pragmatics of visual contents in CDC Covid-19 prevention infographics. Visual practices include the processes of and qualities emerging from the production of images and designs, as well as the activities of sense making that occur during reception which this research attempts to explore. Barnhurst et al. assert that visual pragmatics remained a minor strand in literature for several reasons prominent among which is that scholars consider ethnographic work on the production side a burdensome process requiring human subjects, projections and long hours of interviews, participation and observation followed by slow unpredictable process of transcription and analysis.

The use of various semiotic resources in public communication has shown that meaning is realized

not only through language but also through the integrated use of a wide range of semiotic resources including static and dynamic ones. In addition, the pervasiveness of visual images in computer interface, children's picture books, graphic novels, textbooks, magazines and advertisements require readers to simultaneously employ written texts, visual images and designs to make meaning. These images and texts are being combined in unique ways, and readers in today's world require new skills and strategies for constructing meaning in transaction with the texts as they are encountered during social practices of interpretation, analysis and representations (Serafini, 2009).

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative research designs were employed. The process of analysis of data in this research study is mainly visual. The core data utilized were purposively collected from the five ways of covid -19 prevention infographics designed and presented by the Centre of Disease Control (CDC). This was downloaded from www.avert.org.com(.zip). The linguistic features extracted are analysed based on content analysis while an amalgam of the symbolist- structuralist theory was used for the visual component. Five infographics and displayed ways of preventing Covid-19 by CDC were sourced and selected for the purpose of getting valid answers to the objectives of the study. The choice of CDC is considered justifiable because the researcher believes it is more comprehensive and elaborate. Another reason is that among all the organisations that presented covid -19 prevention infographics, CDC is the only organisation that inscribed its logo at the background of all the infographics. Each infographic preventive strategy is presented in its entirety and is followed by a discussion or analysis to show the pragmatic relevance of the visual contents identified. The infographics are numbered 1 to 5 for clarity and identification.

Data Presentation and analysis:
Infographic 1

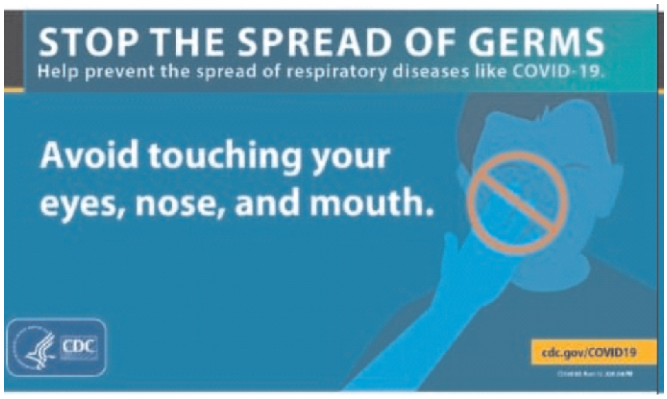


The first infographic displays a white hand being washed under running water. In this infographic the key element is the image of a white hand being washed by running water in blue. The instruction: stop the spread of germs contains the biggest font size in a white colour resting on a blue background. The other detail of the infographic is: wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds printed in a smaller font size with sharp blue colours. The third information: 'help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like Covid-19' in a smallest font size was printed with a white colour. The wite coloured hand signifies purity and cleanliness while the blue coloured water signifies trust and confidence.

The dominant green colour in the background provides emotional motivation and represents nature, organic materials and safety. And the distinctive bright colours of white and blue used on the texts and on the image of the hand and running water help to project the information thus making them thoroughly eye-catching. The visual acts performed are directive and assertive as the visual psychologically compels the audience to always wash their hands often with soap and running water to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and at the same time shows a clear commitment to the truth of the proposition. The CDC logo is carefully placed on

the bottom left side of the infographic and the dominant blue colour while the inscription of CDC with white colour in the logo catches the eye and identifies brand. The visual roles are that of repetition and emphasis. The verbal message is carefully reiterated in the visual image thereby creating more emphasis for clarification and understanding.

Infographic 2:



The infographic consists of a model that placed his right hand on the eye, nose and mouth. The background colour is dominantly blue. The visual and verbal complementation and emphasis are the mode of transmission of the infographic. The visual content is carefully produced and contains icons that are not mentioned in the verbal message. It has a dominant blue background which aesthetically creates the necessary emotional motivation of sadness and sombre. The placement of hand on the eye, nose, and mouth at the same time gives more prominence to what is written verbally in white prints -"Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth…." The side of the hand that is touching these sense organs is circled with red Also a red line is symbolically used to divide the circle into sections and this visually organizes the content and makes it easier for the reader or viewer to interpret the content. The red colour refers to a sense of emergency, a warning signal and danger. As a result, the infographic performs the visual act of being directive by implying: stop using your hands which must have got contaminated to touch your eyes, nose and mouth so that you don't get infected with Covid -19, thereby creating some level of awareness on the audience. Other visual acts performed are the expressive – reflecting the model's state of mind (sadness and warning) and assertive by helping to communicate facts about the Covid-19 prevention techniques. The visual roles performed are complementation and emphasis.

Infographic 3:



Literal message is complemented by visuals in the infographic to convey the needed message. The infographic portrays some gestures/body language. A man is seen holding hands with a little child. This indicates closeness or love. The man was taking away a little child from a sick woman who was captured from medium distance to buttress the message. The green colour dominant in the background depicts a healthy environment. The sick woman is depicted with the images of coronavirus symbols around her head, with a white handkerchief covering her nose, eyes and mouth which clearly shows signs and symptoms of respiratory disease. The first element that grabs the viewers' eye is the white coronavirus symbols which are placed above the woman's head. This stands out and forms the most important aspect of meaning making in the infographics. The empty space between the man, the child and the woman indicates social distancing being advocated as a preventive measure. The bright white colour of Covid-19 symbols and the white handkerchief actually contrasting with the green background is emphatically deployed to make the icons the most

important visual aspects of the graphic. These have a semiotic, semantic and graphological significance as the umbilicus of the visuals. The CDC logo is clearly shown on the bottom left side of the infographic. The text - Avoid contact with people who are sick - written in blue colour possesses the quality of being in the class of 'literal visuals' due to its visual appeal. The distance between the man and the child and the sick woman evokes in the viewers the need to maintain at least one meter distance between humans. The visual acts performed therein is believed to be true and at the same time shows the psychological disposition of the sick woman. It is also directive which aims at achieving a certain change in the current circumstances of the audience.

Infographic 4:



The roles of visual contents in this infographic are repetition, complementation and emphasis. The infographic attracts attention because of the colourfulness as light yellow is the dominant background colour. This connotes happiness and creates a joyful mood. The image of a fair skinned hand holding a white coloured disinfectant visually blends in a brown circled background and makes it thoroughly eye-catching and draws viewers' attention. The text "Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces" is emphatically written in black prints on the bright yellow background to depict mystery, sophistication and elegance. The white coloured disinfectant is inherently and positively used to show safety, illumination, cleanliness, sterility and protection. Repetition of what is written on the text in the infographic is to enhance the powers of persuasion. Pragmatically, the expressive visual acts are performed while at the same time being directive by providing the psychological stimulus to direct the viewers' psyche towards accepting and adapting to the circumstances of cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces to prevent the spread of Covid -19.

Infographic 5:



The female image on the infographic is facing the viewers directly. This makes the connect between the audience and the image more intimate and appeals to the viewers' emotion. Concerning the principles of contrast and emphasis, the white tissue contrasts sharply with the woman's blue coloured skin (a cold colour), while using her hand to place the white tissue on her nose also emphasizes a focal point. Visual – verbal roles are that of repetition, complementation and emphasis. The infographics appeal to the sense of responsibility of individuals to help prevent the spread of Covid-19 by covering their cough or sneeze with a tissue and dispose properly in the trash. The text printed in white colour and the white tissue placed on the blue background catches the audience attention. They form the epicenter from which other images receive their essence. The dominant blue colour background signifies serenity, calmness, intelligence and responsibility. The visual as a whole performs expressive, assertive and directive visual acts by reflecting the model's state of mind, communicating facts about one of the ways to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like covid-19 and

persuading people to take responsibility of their actions.

Summary of occurrence of visual roles:

The first finding shows that visuals play up to three roles in the CDC Covid-19 prevention infographic display. So out of the six roles stipulated by Pearson (2003), the role of emphasis is the highest in the frequency of occurrence with 45%. This indicates that laying emphasis with some visual clues is the optimal means of getting across the information to the target audience. It helps to deepen the pragmatic meaning further than what "words alone can do". A further discovery of how the use of visuals supersedes that of texts in the infographics is that none of the infographics analysed is made exclusively of the verbal message also none of the infographics are made exclusively of visual content. The role of complementation is second in occurrence 37%. This indicates that the finiteness of the verbal message with the liquidity of the visual gives out a balanced message to the viewers without making the unnecessary risk of having a multiplicity of meaning. Out of the three roles, only 18% visual contents play the role of repetition in the infographics. It therefore goes a long way to suggest that apart from merely repeating the semantic value of the words, the visuals help to give out more shades of pragmatic meaning when analysed further within the realm of visual acts.

Table 1: Summary of occurrences of visual acts used in CDC Covid-19 prevention infographics:

Visual Acts	Frequency	Percentage
Directive	5	39
Assertive	3	23
Expressive	5	39
Commissive	0	0
Declarative	0	0
Total	13	100%

One can deduce from table 1 above that out of the five visual acts adapted and adopted for this analysis, visual contents perform three acts comfortably albeit at different frequencies. The most performed acts are the directive and expressive at 39% each. Various interpretation of meanings can be inferred from visual contents of CDC Covid -19 prevention infographics. These range from semantic, semiotic and pragmatic, depending on the relationship and visual elements such as models, write ups, gestures and the use of symbolism. The findings show that visual contents communicate meanings that transcend that which words communicate through the use of models of various genders and social significance, logos, aesthetics and colours. It clearly gives credence to the words of Walter (2012) that pictures have become one of the default modes of sorting and understanding the vast amounts of information people are exposed to every day.

The findings also show that it is possible to do things with visuals "just as it is with words". Corroborating Austin's *Doing Things with Words,* the same yardstick was used to analyse visuals. The analysis reveals that out of the five acts, visuals in CDC Covid -19 prevention infographics can perform three at various frequencies. The directive and expressive acts occurred the most at 39% each; the assertive gets 23%. Given the none occurrence of the commissive and declarative acts, it is clear that visual acts seldom perform these two acts as they relate more to verbal discourse. In the light of the above, this research has been able to prove that visuals also perform acts that 'verbals' also perform.

It is also discovered that the CDC logo is placed in all the infographics at the bottom left side which symbolizes the brand, the name of the organization that has the infographics. The contents of the infographics were well – organized with columns, sections, clear, well balanced and easy to navigate by the audience. They were carefully curated, which gives the viewers the opportunity to understand the overall message of the content in a quick and visually pleasing way. Various colours have come to be identified from the background of the infographics. The findings confirm that colour is a more encompassing mode of creating identity and meanings than words as there are more people who recognize colours than those who can read. Simply put, in visual content colour supersedes verbal texts

in passing the needed information.

Finally, the visual content in infographics is important in the entire language of infographics as it forms the basis for making it attractive, salient and persuasive. These visuals play potent pragmatic roles in their designs which range from the use of colour and aesthetics for identity, models and logos which are painstakingly represented to either repeat, emphasize or complement the verbal message with which they occur in such infographics. The use of models in their various categories as male or female, old or young through their facial expressions and gestures, also multiply the shades of pragmatic presupposition and implications which take root in the viewers' minds and invites them to interact with the images and actors in different ways depending on their various prior knowledge and impressions. Therefore, just as Austin's Speech Acts, the infographics perform a number of visual acts whose illocutionary forces are to appeal to and change the viewers' mindset, attitude and habits towards the covid -19 disease. More interestingly therefore, visuals can perform these acts and at the same time proves to be more potent means of conveying more complex and persuasive information to the target audience than verbal messages.

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