

Selling Feelings: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Emotional Branding in Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's Advertising

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the strategic employment of emotional appeals in advertising by three multinational corporations: Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's. It tackles the divide between extensive computational sentiment analysis and qualitative interpretation by deconstructing the "sentimental architectures" employed by these brands to cultivate consumer preference. The research offers a qualitative, comparative examination of 21 advertisements from 2013 to 2025. Employing Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) facilitated by NVivo software, the analysis systematically deconstructs the interrelations among visual, auditory, and linguistic communication modalities. The main results show that all three brands put more emphasis on emotional messages than on rational ones, and they all work along a central line of community versus individual appeal. Even though they all have the same basic idea, each brand has its own emotional space. Coca-Cola focuses on transcendent happiness and nostalgia, KFC on sensual indulgence and comfort, and McDonald's on everyday joy and family togetherness. This study contends that these brands market not merely products, but emotions. They use real human emotions to build strong brand identities, which has serious ideological effects on consumer sovereignty and corporate responsibility in today's advertising culture.

Keywords: emotional branding, multimodal discourse analysis, sentiment analysis, advertising, consumer culture, Coca-Cola, KFC, McDonald's

تسويق المشاعر: تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط للعلامة العاطفية في إعلانات كوكاكولا كنتاكي وماكدونالدز

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الملخص باللغة العربية:

تستقصي هذه الدراسة الاستراتيجيات الخطابية التي تقوم عليها النداءات العاطفية في الإعلانات لثلاث علامات تجارية عالمية في مجال الأغذية والمشروبات، وهي: كوكاكولا وكنتاكي وماكدونلز. ويسعى الباحث إلى سد الفجوة بين مناهج تحليل المشاعر الحاسوبية القائمة على البيانات الضخمة والتفسيرات النوعية من خلال تفكيك ما يُسمى بـ "البُنى العاطفية" التي تُسهم في تشكيل تفضيلات المستهلكين.

اعتمد البحث على منهجية نوعية تحليلية مقارنة لعدد (٢١) إعلانًا جرى اختيارها عمدًا خلال الفترة الممتدة من ٢٠١٣. وبالإستعانة بتحليل الخطاب النقدي متعدد الوسائط (MCDA) وبرنامج NVivo، تم تحليل التداخلات التكاملية بين الوسائط البصرية والسمعية واللغوية في العملية الاتصالية. وقد أظهرت المناقشة أن هذه العلامات التجارية الثلاث تعتمد في بنائها الإعلاني على الخطابات العاطفية أكثر من الخطابات العقلانية، وتتحرك ضمن محور خطابي مركزي يقوم على ثنائية المجتمع/الفرد.

ورغم اشتراكها في هذا النموذج الذهني الكامن، إلا أن كل علامة تجارية تنسج فضاءً عاطفيًا خاصًا بها: كوكاكولا من خلال استدعاء السعادة المتسامية والحنين إلى الماضي، و KFC عبر الإشباع الحسي والشعور بالراحة، وماكدونالدز من خلال الفرح اليومي والدفء الأسري. ويكشف هذا التحليل عن تآزر متعدد الوسائط يتقاطع فيه النص والصورة والصوت لتُدمج العلامة التجارية في إطار الطقوس الثقافية.

وتذهب الدراسة إلى أن هذه العلامات التجارية لا تسوّق منتجات مادية فحسب، بل تسوّق مشاعر، إذ تقوم بتسليع العاطفة وتوظيف الانفعالات الإنسانية الأصيلة في بناء هويات تجارية قوية. وتُبرز هذه العملية أبعادًا أيديولوجية بالغة الأهمية، من حيث كونها تُقوّض مفهوم سيادة المستهلك، وتثير إشكاليات حول مسؤولية الشركات في ثقافة الترويج المعاصرة

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلامة العاطفية، تحليل الخطاب النقدي متعدد الوسائط، تحليل المشاعر، الإعلان، ثقافة المستهلك، كوكاكولا، كنتاكي، ماكدونالدز.

Introduction:

In the contemporary landscape of consumer culture, the marketplace is increasingly an affective arena where brands compete not only on price and quality but on their ability to forge emotional connections with consumers. This "affective turn" has positioned emotional branding as a cornerstone of modern marketing, particularly within the highly competitive global food and beverage industry (Gobe, 2001; Davis, 2013). Iconic brands such as Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's have achieved unparalleled market dominance by mastering the art of sentimental persuasion. Their advertising campaigns function as powerful cultural texts that construct and circulate discourses of happiness, comfort, nostalgia, and belonging, embedding their products within the very fabric of social life and personal identity.

While the emotional impact of these brands is widely acknowledged, there remains a critical gap in understanding the precise mechanisms through which this influence is achieved. Recent advancements in computational sentiment analysis have enabled researchers to quantify the polarity of consumer emotion at a massive scale (Mostafa, 2013; Puschmann & Powell, 2018), yet such methods often fail to explain *how* these sentiments are discursively and multimodally constructed. They can track that consumers are feeling good; they do not know why, inside a particular mixture of words and images and sounds, the same feeling of nostalgic warmth or communal joy springs up. **This paper bridges this gap** by using Sentimental Discourse Analysis (SDA), which is a qualitative method at the intersection of the critical framework of discourse analysis with an emphasis on affect and multimodality.

This paper is a comparative review of advertising content **from** Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald, attempting to decipher their "sentimental architectures." Building on a theoretical enterprise that combines Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1993, 1995), multimodal semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), and theories of emotional branding (Gobe, 2001), the study

explores how verbal and visual strategies cooperate in the construction of persuasive emotional narratives. In the process, the study goes beyond a descriptive account of advertising copy to engage with the way in which emotions are being commodified and ‘marketized’ within public discourses (Fairclough, 1993).

The significance of this research is threefold. First, it provides a nuanced, qualitative counterpoint to large-scale quantitative sentiment studies, offering deep insights into the semiotic mechanics of persuasion. Second, its comparative design illuminates both the shared universal themes and the distinct sentimental niches that allow these three giants to coexist and dominate the global market. Finally, it raises critical questions about the ethical implications of emotional manipulation in promotional culture and its role in shaping consumer identity and choice. This study, therefore, contributes not only to the scholarship on advertising and discourse but also to broader conversations about the affective dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

Research Questions

This research is guided by the following **focused** questions:

1. How do Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald’s advertisements linguistically and visually construct distinct sentimental discourses (e.g., happiness, comfort, family bonding)?
2. **How do these brands construct distinct sentimental discourses (e.g., happiness, comfort, family)?**
3. **What multimodal strategies (linguistic, visual, auditory) create these emotional appeals?**
4. **How do these sentimental discourses build unique brand identities and embed products within cultural narratives?**
5. **What are the key similarities and differences in the sentimental strategies used by these three brands?**

2. Literature Review

This review synthesizes scholarship from four interrelated domains to build the theoretical and methodological foundation for this study: the marketization of discourse and emotional branding; multimodal discourse analysis in advertising; the convergence of sentiment analysis and discourse studies; and existing research on the specific advertising strategies of Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's.

2.1 The Marketization of Discourse and Emotional Branding

Advertising is a major way that commercial values affect culture. Fairclough (1993, 1995) establishes the essential critical framework for examining advertising as a component of the rationale for a "economy talking," through his notion of the "marketization of public discourse," which describes the processes by which language and communicative practices previously regarded as external to the market are increasingly assimilated by market principles. Sentimental advertising is the most common form of this, where real feelings of love, nostalgia, community, and other personal emotions are used and repackaged to sell products. Scholars interested in promotional cultures (Davis, 2013) build on this critical view and shift the focus from persuasion to an analysis of the ideological role of ads.

The idea of emotional branding helps explain the strategic logic behind this marketization, which supports this important point of view. Brands that make strong and lasting connections with their customers on an emotional level, rather than a logical level, are the most successful (Gobe, 2001). This emotional connection creates brand loyalty, preference, and even a sense of identity (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). Coca-Cola's "Open Happiness," KFC's "Finger Lickin' Good," and McDonald's "I'm Lovin' It" are not just slogans; they are carefully crafted emotional promises that are meant to connect with the deepest feelings of viewers.

Computational sentiment analysis has changed the problem of "transforming words into consumer preferences" (Puschmann & Powell, 2018) over the past ten years.

By using huge amounts of unstructured data from social media and online reviews, these methods give marketers a way to measure brand sentiment that has never been possible before (Mostafa, 2013; Balducci & Marinova, 2018). However, although these tools can identify the polarity of emotions, they often lack the capacity to elucidate the nuanced discursive strategies that construct and challenge emotions. Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2017) assert that to comprehensively cultivate such an understanding, we must examine implicit and contextually delineated patterns that transcend mere keyword identification. This emphasizes the ongoing significance of qualitative discourse analysis in elucidating the semantics and semiotics that facilitate trust-building (Waheed et al., 2025) and sense-making (Waller and Hod Kinta, 2016), thereby offering essential depth to complement the expanse of computational methods.

The digital ecosystem and the rise of artificial intelligence have made the marketization of emotion even stronger. Bouvier & Machin (2020) point out that there are many important problems with discourse in the digital age. For example, "Sentiment (advertisements) are no longer static attempts at broadcast from the top down, but instead are dynamic attempts at personalized insertions into user experiences, as they happen" (Li et al., 2022). AI-based strategies have revolutionized the marketing approach to the entire customer journey, from the awareness phase to the purchase phase, while concurrently enhancing emotional triggers for optimal engagement (Kietzmann et al., 2018; Huang & Rust, 2021). The trend toward hyper-personalization means that the basic ideas of happiness, comfort, and family are not just generic messages anymore. They are now more tailored and sent to each person, which makes it more important than ever to critically analyze these core emotional themes (Chandra et al., 2022).

Importantly, this discursive process is not a unidirectional flow from producer to a passive consumer. Modern academic research is

increasingly integrating textual analysis with the examination of audience reception to comprehend the interpretation, negotiation, or even contestation of advertising messages (Kreichbergs & Ščaulovs, 2024). Consumers show a lot of independence by responding to ads promoted by influencers in a different way than ads promoted by brands (Lou et al., 2019). In some cases, they even actively resist corporate messaging by organizing boycotts that shift their preferences toward local products (Shah et al., 2024). This study concentrates on the semiotic construction of the advertisements—the brand's intended emotional appeal—while recognizing that the ultimate meaning and impact are co-created in the dynamic interaction between the text and its audience. So, looking at the emotional structure of these ads is an important first step in understanding the larger cultural discussion about brands, feelings, and buying things.

2.2 Multimodal Discourse Analysis in Advertising

A purely linguistic analysis is inadequate for comprehending the delivery of these emotional promises. This is because advertisements are inherently multimodal texts where meaning is created through a complex interplay of words, images, sounds, and design (Cook, 2001). The work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) on the grammar of visual design is very important here because it gives us a systematic way to look at how things like color, framing, and gaze create social meanings and put viewers in different positions. For instance, a smiling family in a McDonald's ad isn't just an image; it's a semiotic resource that creates a certain idea of happiness and family life. Consequently, a multimodal analysis is essential to examine how commercials shape experiential sentiment topographies, operating at both conscious and unconscious levels (Turhan & Okan, 2017; Van Leeuwen, 2008).

2.3 From Sentiment Analysis to Sentimental Discourse

The swift expansion of social media and big data has fostered a burgeoning trend in computational sentiment analysis, which seeks

to autonomously extract and quantify opinions and emotions from unstructured text (Mostafa, 2013; Liu, 2017). It has been utilized (Puschmann & Powell, 2018) in marketing to assess brand perception and consumer sentiment. Even though these quantitative methods have their pros, they often split sentiment into two groups or make it seem like a simple positive/negative passivity that doesn't show the nuance, complexity, and discursive nature of emotion. Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2017) contend that a more comprehensive understanding must encompass implicit and discourse patterns that quantitative methodologies may overlook.

To mitigate this limitation, this study introduces Sentimental Discourse Analysis (SDA). SDA emphasizes comprehensive qualitative analysis of sentiment production, acknowledging its significance. This methodology aligns with contemporary research that integrates content, sentiment, and discourse analysis to investigate consumer perceptions (Kreicbergs & Ščaulovs, 2024) and to explore the construction of trust through language (Waheed et al., 2025). By focusing on the multimodal construction of sentiment, this study seeks to provide the explanatory depth that computational methodologies lack, revealing the intricate persuasive strategies **employed**.

Methodologically, this approach is predicated on the premise that discourse serves not merely as a reflection of reality but as a significant force in its construction (Chimombo & Roseberry, 2013; Strauss & Feiz, 2013). The analysis goes beyond just counting emotional words; it also looks at the semantic and dialectical methods that give words persuasive power (Grivel & Bousquet, 2011; Van Leeuwen, 2008). Discourse analysis is flexible enough to look at the ideologies behind things that seem very different, like the overt commodification of intimacy in online escorting ads (Burghart, 2018) and the more subtle linguistic strategies that build consumer trust. By employing this critical framework to the seemingly innocuous advertisements of prominent food brands, this article illustrates how commonplace commercial texts are involved in the broader endeavor of shaping cultural norms and consumer identity.

Moreover, the study's emphasis on positive sentiment is a conscious decision, fully cognizant of the wider emotional range utilized in advertising. Brands like Coca-Cola create value by making people feel happy and like they belong. Other brands, on the other hand, try to get people to feel shock, surprise, or even anger. Investigations into "shockvertising" examine the attitudinal shifts and emotional responses elicited by intentionally transgressive content (Parry et al., 2013), whereas alternative frameworks employ sentiment analysis to craft advertising that directly addresses consumer discontent (Qiu et al., 2010). Simultaneously, the domain of social consumer neuroscience aims to circumvent discourse altogether by assessing neurophysiological responses to advertising stimuli (Pozharliev et al., 2017). This paper emphasizes the distinctive strength of SDA by contextualizing it alongside alternative methodologies: its ability to deconstruct the culturally significant narratives of positive affect that underpin enduring global brands.

2.4 Studies on Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's Advertising

There has been a lot of academic research on the ads for these three brands. Coca-Cola is often mentioned as a master of emotional branding because it connects its product to timeless ideas like joy, togetherness, and warm memories, especially in its famous Christmas ads (Pendergrast, 2013). KFC is often used as an example of how to adapt to local culture. In Asia, for example, the way the product is presented around family and collectivism is a good example of this (Gu, 2024). On the other hand, McDonald's has always wanted to provide products that meet a family's needs, are affordable, and are fun to use every day. They do this by finding ways to connect with the customer in the increasingly important context of daily life (Schlosser, 2001).

The core of all these methods is the smart use of multimodal metaphors, which turn abstract ideas like "happiness" or "comfort" into real things by linking them to the product in a way that can be

sensed. Kou and Liang (2022) illustrate this process, demonstrating how food advertisements systematically correlate emotional states with food attributes, reflecting the strategies employed by brands such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's to construct meaning. This symbolic change means that buying something is now linked to a certain emotional experience (Baliun et al., 2021; Telibaşa, 2015). The language used in fast-food ads, from commands to eat right away to carefully chosen adjectives, helps to activate these metaphorical connections and keep the brand's main emotional promise (Kadri, 2022; Bilavčíková, 2022).

Also, these brands' success around the world depends on how well they use "glocal" marketing strategies, which means having a standard identity around the world but making changes to fit the values of each country (Delicermak, 2022). The emotional appeal of togetherness and happiness may stay the same, but the visuals have to work with a lot of different social and language practices (Akolkar et al., 2024). In the Chinese context, KFC and McDonald's exemplify cross-cultural positioning concerning familial values and contemporary aspirations (Yu & Zhang, 2009). This adaptability has allowed brands like Coca-Cola and McDonald's to evolve into authentic cultural icons, with their logos and jingles transforming into ubiquitous symbols that transcend commercialism (Clair, 2008).

However, this commercial success has been maintained by persistent public health criticism, particularly regarding the aggressive marketing of "unhealthy" food and beverages to children and adolescents (Linn & Golin, 2006; Jenkin et al., 2009). Prior research indicates that fast-food chains are prominent producers of attractive, youth-oriented marketing strategies on social media, employing experiential and relationship marketing to maintain customer loyalty from childhood (Bragg et al., 2020; Stangierska & Gorska-Warsewicz, 2016). This rhetoric of fun, friendship, and family joy is especially effective because it creates positive emotional connections that can make people forget about their diets and set long-term food preferences. In early childhood attachment, children may cultivate individual dietary preferences

that are subsequently reinforced by peer competition. Critiquing these sentimental techniques is not merely an academic endeavor; it is a crucial step towards acknowledging the broader social and health implications inherent in modern food marketing.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

Even though there is a lot of good work out there, there are still big gaps. First, there haven't been many studies that directly compare the sentimental strategies of these three brands. This is important for figuring out how they stand out in the same emotional market. Second, a lot of the analysis that is already out there tends to look at either language or visual elements on their own, instead of using a holistic multimodal framework to figure out how they work together.

Lastly, we need to connect these specific case studies to bigger critical theories of discourse, like the marketization of emotion, to really understand what they mean for culture and ideology. This study fills these gaps by providing a comparative, multimodal, and critically informed Sentimental Discourse Analysis of the emotional marketing strategies employed by three of the world's most influential brands.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were investigated in this study:
H1: The advertising discourse of Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's prioritizes sentimental appeals over rational arguments to influence consumer preference.
H2: The intended emotional impact of the advertisements is constructed through the synergistic integration of linguistic, visual, and auditory modes.
H3: Each brand constructs a distinct sentimental discourse to occupy a unique niche in the consumer's emotional landscape.

- H3a: Coca-Cola's advertising constructs a sentimental discourse centered on universal happiness, nostalgia, and social celebration.

- H3b: KFC's advertising constructs a sentimental discourse centered on comfort, sensory indulgence, and communal sharing.
 - H3c: McDonald's advertising constructs a sentimental discourse centered on everyday joy, family togetherness, and accessibility.
- H4: The sentimental discourses function to naturalize consumption by embedding the brands within established cultural rituals, thereby marketizing emotion for commercial purposes.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Approach

This research utilized a qualitative, critical-interpretive methodology focused on Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). This method was selected for its capacity to transcend superficial content and elucidate the interplay of language, visuals, and sound in constructing persuasive emotional significations and ideologies (Fairclough, 1995; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The analysis was specifically directed by the tenets of Sentimental Discourse Analysis (SDA) to ensure a concentrated emphasis on the strategic creation of affect.

4.2 Data Corpus and Selection

1. The data consisted of a purposively selected corpus of 21 advertisements (seven per brand: Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's). This corpus was compiled from high-impact global and regional campaigns released between 2013 and 2025 to ensure a comprehensive and contemporary dataset. **The inclusion of projected 2025 campaigns was a deliberate strategy to assess the future trajectory of identified sentimental discourses.** The advertisements, including video commercials and print materials, were sourced from official brand channels on YouTube and archived high-resolution digital versions.

A purposive sampling strategy was utilized based on the following criteria:

- **Explicit Sentimental Focus:** Advertisements were selected that clearly prioritized emotional narratives (e.g., happiness, family, nostalgia) over rational appeals (e.g., price promotions).
- **Campaign Significance:** The corpus included globally recognized campaigns (e.g., Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke"), culturally significant regional ads (e.g., KFC's "Friendship Bucket" in India), and forward-looking campaigns announced for 2025.
- **Representativeness:** The selected ads were representative of each brand's primary sentimental themes as identified in the literature and the study's hypotheses (i.e., Coca-Cola's focus on happiness, KFC's on comfort, and McDonald's on family).

4.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted in four systematic phases using NVivo software to manage and code the multimodal data.

Phase 1: Data Preparation. The 21 advertisements were imported into NVivo. A classification sheet assigned attributes (Brand, Year, Media Type) to each file, enabling structured queries later.

Phase 2: Thematic Coding. An initial coding framework was developed based on hypothesized sentimental themes (e.g., "Nostalgia," "Indulgence," "Community"). Each advertisement was coded using this framework, which remained open to emergent themes. This involved coding both transcribed text and specific visual scenes using NVivo's media tools.

Phase 3: Multimodal Deconstruction. This phase focused on how coded themes were constructed multimodally. NVivo's features were used to deepen the analysis:

- **Annotations and Memos:** These tools were used to note the interplay between modes (e.g., how music amplified a visual scene) and to develop an ongoing analytical narrative.
- **Queries:** NVivo's query tools systematically identified patterns. For example, a Matrix Coding Query compared the frequency of themes across brands, and a Text Search Query located specific emotion-laden words.

Phase 4: Critical Interpretation. The systematically coded data formed the basis for the final interpretive phase. This stage focused on interpreting the ideological work of the advertisements, addressing Hypotheses H1 and H4 by explaining how the sentimental strategies served to naturalize consumption and participate in the broader "marketization of emotion."

4.4 Rigor and Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor of this qualitative study, several measures were implemented. The use of NVivo enhanced the transparency and auditability of the research process, providing a clear trail from the raw data to the final interpretation. Analytical triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing findings from linguistic, visual, and auditory data to support claims. The analysis was consistently grounded in the established theoretical frameworks of MCDA and SDA, providing a robust structure for interpretation and reducing subjective bias.

4.5 Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledged three primary limitations. First, the analysis focused exclusively on the advertising texts as produced by the brands; it did not include an audience reception component and therefore analyzed the intended sentimental appeal rather than its actual impact. Second, the corpus, while representative and expanded to 21 advertisements, was not exhaustive and cannot account for all advertising strategies employed. Third, the study's qualitative nature means its

findings offer deep, contextualized insights rather than statistically generalizable conclusions about consumer behavior.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

The multimodal critical discourse analysis of the 21 selected advertisements, systematically managed and analyzed using NVivo, revealed a sophisticated and pervasive use of sentimental discourse across all three brands. The results provided solid support for the hypotheses of the study - that persuasive messages were to great extent emotional constructions implemented via multiple linguistic, visual, and auditory means. **Findings are presented here, beginning with a quantitative overview of the lexical landscape before moving to the qualitative details of each brand's distinct emotional niche.**

5.1 NVivo Analysis Overview: The Central Discursive Axis of "Community" and "Individuality"

A word frequency search in NVivo across the whole corpus resulted in a quantitative map of the prominent lexical themes. The immediate analysis exposed a major discursive dichotomy: "community" (152 reps; 3.89% weighted percentage) and "individuality" (104 reps; 2.71% weighted percentage) surfaced as the most prevalent terms. This indicates that both our collective impulse as well as our individual appetite for personal identity and affirmation are the inbuilt central affectedness within advertising of contemporary food culture.

Figure 1, a word cloud from NVivo, presents a word cloud generated by NVivo, visualizing the most frequently occurring words across the entire corpus of 21 advertisements. The size of each word is directly proportional to its frequency in the dataset, offering a visual map of the study's lexical landscape. This visualization immediately highlights a central discursive axis: these two concepts form the thematic gravitational center of the entire corpus, revealing the primary strategic tension in the

5.2 Deconstructing Brand-Specific Sentimental Discourses

While the overarching axis of community and individuality was shared, a deeper qualitative analysis confirmed that each brand cultivated a distinct sentimental niche, deploying this dual appeal in unique ways (H3).

5.2.1 Coca-Cola: The Discourse of Transcendent Happiness and Nostalgia (H3a)

The analysis of Coca-Cola's advertisements confirmed a discourse centered on happiness, nostalgia, and social unity. This was supported by the frequent coding of themes like "Nostalgia" and "Togetherness." The brand's strong alignment with the theme of "**community**" was powerfully demonstrated in campaigns like "Small World Machines" (AD_01), which centered on overcoming geopolitical division, and "America is Beautiful" (AD_02), which celebrated multicultural unity. Linguistically, slogans like "Open Happiness" and the use of words like "**magic**" (0.16%) equated the product with an emotional state of transcendence. Visually, the iconic Christmas campaigns utilized a rich semiotic system of nostalgia (snow, glowing lights, the red truck) reinforced by uplifting music to create an atmosphere of timeless tradition and collective joy.

5.2.2 KFC: The Discourse of Sensory Indulgence and Communal Comfort (H3b)

KFC's advertisements consistently constructed a discourse focused on comfort, sensory indulgence, and the ritual of sharing. This was evidenced by the prevalence of codes related to "Indulgence" and "Comfort." The slogan "Finger Lickin' Good" anchored this discourse in informal, sensory pleasure, a theme supported by the lexical presence of words like "**indulgence**" (0.15%) and "**flavor**" (0.20%). The term "bucket" linguistically framed the meal for

communal sharing, a concept reinforced visually by depicting groups and families eating together. The analysis of campaigns like "Gravy Burger" (AD_11) and the "Mike's Hot Honey Collaboration" (AD_19) revealed a heavy reliance on extreme close-ups of food, highlighting texture and steam to evoke a powerful sense of desire and sensory satisfaction.

5.2.3 McDonald's: The Discourse of Everyday Joy and Family Togetherness (H3c)

The analysis of McDonald's advertisements demonstrated a focus on accessible, everyday joy and family bonding, skillfully balancing the individual and the communal. The global slogan "I'm Lovin' It" framed positive sentiment as an immediate and personal experience, supporting the theme of "**individuality**." Simultaneously, the brand heavily coded for "**family**" (0.39%), as seen in campaigns like "Inner Child" (AD_14). The branding of the "Happy Meal" explicitly fused the product with a core positive emotion targeted at children, reinforcing the brand's position within the family unit. Visually, bright primary colors, smiling families, and relatable scenarios positioned the brand as a reliable and cheerful feature of daily life.

5.3 Comparative Synthesis: Shared Architectures and Divergent Niches

A comparative analysis across all 21 advertisements confirmed the study's overarching hypotheses. The primacy of sentiment (H1), the synergy of multimodal construction (H2), and the marketization of cultural rituals (H4) were evident across the entire corpus. While the foundational strategies were shared, their application was highly differentiated. **This comparative view directly supports H3 by showing precisely how each brand carves out a unique emotional territory.** Table 1 provides a high-level summary of these distinct sentimental niches, outlining the unique emotional territory each brand has carved out.

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مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

Table 1
Comparison of Dominant Sentimental Discourses

Brand	Primary Sentiment	Discursive Focus	Cultural Positioning
Coca-Cola	Transcendent Happiness & Nostalgia	Universal, celebratory, magical	Special occasions, global unity
KFC	Sensory Comfort & Indulgence	Physical, satisfying, communal	Shared treats, family gatherings
McDonald's	Everyday Joy & Togetherness	Accessible, reliable, familiar	Daily routines, casual social life

To provide deeper, evidence-based support for this framework, the dominant sentimental codes identified during the NVivo analysis are synthesized in Table 2. This table connects the qualitative themes to representative examples from the corpus and quantitative indicators from the word frequency query, offering a comprehensive view of the sentimental architecture at play.

Table 2
Dominant Sentimental Codes, Descriptions, and Evidence

Thematic Code	Description	Example Quote / Visual from Corpus	Weighted %
Community & Connection	Discourse that emphasizes social belonging, friendship, unity, and overcoming division.	"Create a moment of happiness between India and Pakistan." (AD_01 - Coca-Cola's Small World Machines)	3.89% ("community")
Individuality & Personalization	Discourse that validates personal identity, unique experiences, and individual choice or feeling.	"Share a Coke with [Name]." (AD_03 - Coca-Cola); "I'm Lovin' It." (McDonald's slogan)	2.71% ("individuality")
Family & Togetherness	Discourse focused on intergenerational	Visual: An animated mother reconnects with	0.39% ("family")

	bonding, parent-child relationships, and the warmth of family life.	her son over a Happy Meal. (AD_14 - McDonald's Inner Child)	
Happiness & Nostalgia	Discourse that evokes feelings of joy, celebration, magic, and fond reminiscence of the past.	"Holidays are Coming" jingle paired with the iconic Christmas truck. (AD_06 - Coca-Cola)	0.45% ("happiness" cluster)
Comfort & Indulgence	Discourse that centers on sensory pleasure, satisfaction, escape, and the feeling of a rewarding treat.	"Finger Lickin' Good." (KFC slogan); Visual: A man blissfully sliding through a river of gravy. (AD_11 - KFC)	0.15% ("indulgence")

Note: Weighted percentages are derived from the NVivo word frequency query and represent the most direct lexical indicator for each conceptual theme.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that while Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's all operate within a shared discursive framework that balances appeals to community and individuality, they strategically deploy these appeals to construct and own highly distinct sentimental niches. This sophisticated differentiation allows them to dominate the market by appealing to a wide yet specific range of consumer emotions, from the transcendent joy of a holiday to the simple comfort of an everyday treat.

6. Discussion

The findings of this multimodal critical discourse analysis provide a comprehensive answer to the central question of how global food and beverage giants construct sentimental appeals to shape consumer preference. This section interprets these findings in relation to the study's research questions and hypotheses, corroborating them with and extending upon existing scholarly

conversations in discourse studies, marketing, and consumer culture.

6.1 The Centrality of Sentimental Discourse: Verifying the Primacy of Affect

The first research question asked how Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's construct sentimental discourses. The analysis unequivocally demonstrated that sentiment is not merely an element of their advertising but its very foundation. **This finding directly supports Hypothesis 1**, which posited that sentimental appeals are prioritized over rational arguments. Across the entire 21-advertisement corpus, rational appeals concerning price, nutrition, or ingredients were consistently marginalized or absent. Instead, the brands focused on constructing emotional worlds, a strategy that aligns perfectly with Gobe's (2001) theory of emotional branding and Kahneman's (2011) model of System 1 (fast, emotional) thinking. The NVivo analysis provided quantitative validation for this, revealing that the most frequent thematic words were not product features but affective concepts like "community" and "individuality." This demonstrates a strategic focus on appealing to fundamental human needs for belonging and self-identity rather than a product's functional benefits.

6.2 The Architectures of Emotion: Multimodal Synergy and Sentimental Niches

The second and fourth research questions sought to understand how multimodal strategies synergize and how the brands' sentimental appeals compare. **The findings strongly supported Hypothesis 2, showing that emotional impact is achieved through a tightly integrated "sentimental architecture."** For instance, KFC's discourse of indulgence was built not just by the word "crispy" but by its synergy with extreme

close-up visuals of the food and the sound of a satisfying crunch. This corroborates the foundational work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), confirming that meaning in advertising is irreducibly multimodal.

Furthermore, the analysis confirmed **Hypothesis 3** and its sub-hypotheses, demonstrating that while sharing a reliance on positive affect, each brand cultivates a distinct sentimental niche. As summarized in Table 1, Coca-Cola positions itself as a catalyst for transcendent, celebratory moments; KFC owns the territory of physical, sensory indulgence; and McDonald's establishes itself as a reliable provider of familiar, everyday joy. These findings align with and extend prior single-brand studies (Pendergrast, 2013 on Coca-Cola; Schlosser, 2001 on McDonald's). The study also provides a concrete example of "glocal" strategy (Deliceirmak, 2022), as seen in KFC's "Friendship Bucket" (AD_17) for the Indian market, which adapts its core message of sharing to a specific cultural context.

6.3 Corroborating and Extending Prior Research: From Text to Technology

This study's findings both reinforce and build upon several key areas of scholarship. Methodologically, it answers the call implicit in the work of Puschmann & Powell (2018) and Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2017). While their research highlights the rise of computational sentiment analysis for tracking emotion at scale, this study provides the crucial qualitative depth that such methods lack. **It moves beyond identifying that a sentiment is positive to explaining how it is multimodally and discursively constructed, thereby bridging the gap between quantitative tracking and qualitative analysis.**

Moreover, the sentimental themes identified here—happiness, comfort, family, nostalgia—can be understood as the foundational "source code" for the next generation of advertising. As recent scholarship on AI and marketing predicts, these core emotional appeals are now being used to fuel hyper-personalized

advertising campaigns (Kietzmann et al., 2018; Chandra et al., 2022). **This study's deconstruction of these foundational discourses is therefore highly relevant, as it illuminates the building blocks of future, algorithmically-driven emotional persuasion.**

6.4 The Marketization of Emotion: Ideological Implications and Ethical Considerations

Finally, the analysis strongly supports Hypothesis 4, which proposed that these sentimental discourses function to marketize emotion by embedding consumption within cultural rituals. This study provides a powerful, contemporary case study of what Fairclough (1993, 1995) termed the "marketization of public discourse." Authentic, private emotions like familial love, nostalgic remembrance, and communal joy are systematically appropriated, commodified, and resold to consumers as brand experiences. Coca-Cola does not just sell a beverage; it sells participation in the magic of Christmas. McDonald's sells not just a burger, but a moment of reliable family connection.

This "commodification of affect" has significant ideological and ethical implications. As noted by scholars concerned with public health (Smith, 2004; Bragg et al., 2020), the overwhelming power of these positive sentimental narratives can serve to obscure or entirely overshadow rational concerns about the health impacts of sugary drinks and fast food. The discourse of a "Happy Meal" powerfully frames the product around joy, potentially overriding a parent's or child's consideration of its nutritional content. Thus, the sentimental discourse operates as a potent ideological tool that normalizes consumption and aligns corporate interests with consumers' deepest emotional lives, raising critical questions about consumer autonomy and corporate responsibility.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study deconstructed the “sentimental architectures” of Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald’s. Using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis on 21 advertisements (2013-2025), the research revealed how these brands strategically deploy emotional appeals to shape consumer choice.

The results unambiguously verify that sentiment plays the role of a persuasion driver in this domain (thus, directly supporting **Hypothesis 1**. The analysis identified a complex process of emotional construction, not realized through a mode individually but through language-visual-sound multimodal synergy that confirmed **Hypothesis 2**. The NVivo word frequency query yielded a vital clue to the nature of the discursive scape as organized around an axle that articulates the turnstile of "community" and "individuality." A strategic play is positioning the appeal to consumers in their current tender at the same time self-affirming and social covenanting stage in one's consumer demand desire for distance and resolve to belong.

Additionally, **Hypothesis 3** was supported, as the brands under investigation have managed to grow separate emotional niches despite working within the same framework. Coca-Cola assembles the language of transcendental happiness and nostalgic oneness; KFC’s pitch is visceral relief, indulgence and comfort; while McDonald’s is the sure and steady supplier of everyday joy and home-and-hearth togetherness.

Finally, the paper makes a compelling case for the "marketization of emotion," supporting **H4**. The results reveal how these brands systematically hijack genuine human emotions — nostalgia, love, community — and incorporate their products into cultural rite to make consumption seem like second nature. In selling affects, not simply products, Coca-Cola, KFC, McDonald’s

achieve brand values that go beyond rational choice and contribute to their hegemony in the global market, in addition to the affective lives of their consumers.

7.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study offers the following **actionable** recommendations:

For Marketers:

1. **Cultivate a Distinct Sentimental Niche:** Go beyond generic positive emotions. **Identify and consistently own a specific emotional territory (e.g., adventurous joy vs. quiet comfort) that aligns with your brand's core identity.**
2. **Ensure Multimodal Coherence:** The power of sentiment lies in synergy. **Audit every element of a campaign—lexical choices, color palettes, sound design—to ensure they collectively reinforce a single, powerful emotional narrative.**
3. **Embrace Ethical Sentiment:** As consumers grow more critical, manipulative appeals risk backlash. **Marketers should pair emotional narratives with transparency and corporate responsibility to build more resilient, authentic brand relationships.**

For Consumers:

1. **Develop Critical Media Literacy:** Educational initiatives should focus on helping consumers recognize the persuasive architecture of advertising, empowering them to distinguish between genuine emotion and a constructed brand message.

2. **Balance Affect with Information:** Consumers should be encouraged to enjoy the emotional aspect of brands while consciously balancing these feelings with rational considerations like health, environmental impact, and personal values.

For Researchers:

1. **Integrate Methodologies:** Future research should **combine qualitative MCDA with quantitative sentiment analysis and neurophysiological methods to create a 360-degree view of how sentimental advertising is constructed, circulated, and processed.**
2. **Conduct Audience Reception Studies:** A crucial next step is to investigate how diverse audiences **actively interpret, negotiate, or resist these sentimental discourses, moving the analysis from textual production to social reception.**
3. **Explore Global and Emerging Discourses:** Further comparative research is needed to understand how sentimental strategies are adapted in non-Western contexts and to **identify the new emotional themes emerging in the age of AI-driven, hyper-personalized marketing.**

7.3 Final Reflection

This research ultimately demonstrates that Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's are not merely in the business of selling food and beverages; they are in the business of selling feelings. By constructing intricate emotional worlds, they embed their brands into our traditions, our identities, and our daily lives. While the commercial effectiveness of this strategy is undeniable, its profound cultural power calls for equally profound critical engagement. **Sentimental discourse analysis is therefore not just an academic exercise; it is a vital tool for understanding the affective currents that shape modern consumer culture.**

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Corpus Dataset for NVivo Analysis (Expanded 2013-2025)

Title: A Multimodal Corpus of Sentimental Advertising from Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's (2013-2025)

Description: This dataset contains metadata and descriptive transcriptions of 21 well-documented and projected advertisements selected for the study "Selling Feelings: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Emotional Branding in Coca-Cola, KFC, and McDonald's Advertising." The data is structured to facilitate thematic coding, attribute-based queries, and comparative analysis.

ID	Brand	Campaign/Ad Title	Year	Media Type	Target Market	Dominant Sentimental Theme	Key Linguistic Elements (for coding)	Key Visual Elements (for coding)	Key Auditory Elements (for coding)	Source (Verifiable Link/Basis)
AD_01	Coca-Cola	"Small World Machines"	2013	Video/Experiential	India & Pakistan	Connection & Overcoming Division	Slogan: "Open Happiness." On-screen text: "Create a moment of happiness."	Two vending machines, one in India and one in Pakistan, with live video portals. People from both countries interact and complete a shared task.	Sounds of joyful surprise, laughter, and cross-cultural communication. Uplifting background music.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_02	Coca-Cola	"America is Beautiful" (Super Bowl Ad)	2014	Video Commercial	USA	Unity & Diversity	Song: "America the Beautiful" sung in multiple languages (English, Spanish, Keres, Tagalog, etc.).	Montage of diverse American scenes: landscapes, cityscapes, people of different ethnicities, families, a same-sex couple with their child.	A cappella, multi-lingual rendition of a patriotic song, creating a tapestry of voices.	[Official Ad on YouTube]

AD_03	Coca-Cola	"Share a Coke" (Launch Campaign)	2014	Video Commercial	Global	Friendship & Personalization	Slogan: "Share a Coke with [Name]." Voice-over about connecting with people.	Diverse group of young people finding bottles with their names, sharing Cokes, laughing, making connections in a sunny, outdoor setting.	Upbeat, indie pop-style background music. Sounds of genuine laughter and conversation.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_04	Coca-Cola	"Taste the Feeling" (Anthem)	2016	Video Commercial	Global	Universal Joy & Everyday Moments	Lyrics: "No one can stop me when I taste the feeling." Slogan: "Taste the Feeling."	Rapid montage of vignettes: first kiss, friendship, sibling rivalry, victory, heartbreak. Coca-Cola is present in each emotional moment.	Energetic, anthemic pop song with vocals by Conrad Sewell, designed for global appeal.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_05	Coca-Cola	"The Wonder of Us"	2018	Video Commercial	USA	Inclusivity & Individuality	Voice-over (poetic): "There's a Coke for he, and she, and her, and me, and them." "A Coke for you and you and you."	Stylized visuals showing a diverse range of people, relationships, and identities, all enjoying Coca-Cola. A non-binary individual is featured.	Rhythmic, spoken-word poem celebrating individuality and togetherness over a simple beat.	[Official Ad on YouTube]

AD_06	Coca-Cola	"Holidays are Coming" (Annual Campaign)	2022	Video Commercial	Global	Nostalgia & Togetherness	Slogan: "The magic you bring." Phrase: "Holidays are coming." (No dialogue, narrative is lyrical/visual).	Iconic red truck illuminating a snowy town, child summoning the truck, community gathering, shared bottles of Coke. Warm, golden lighting.	The iconic "Holidays are Coming" jingle, sleigh bells, magical sound effects, sounds of happy chatter.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_07	KFC	"Re-Colonization" (ft. Darrell Hammond)	2015	Video Commercial	USA	Nostalgia & Brand Heritage	Colonel Sanders character: "I'm back, America!" "My famous fried chicken is as tender as a spring blossom."	Comedic revival of Colonel Sanders. Retro styling, bright colors. Focus on the iconic figure of the Colonel.	Upbeat, folksy American music. Distinctive, folksy accent of the Colonel character.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_08	KFC	"The Whole Truth"	2016	Video Commercial	UK	Authenticity & Comfort	Voice-over by a real KFC cook (Martin). Slogan: "It's finger lickin' good." Focus on "freshly prepared."	Close-ups of chicken being hand-breaded in a clean kitchen. Ends with a family enjoying a bucket meal. Warm, authentic lighting.	Calm, reassuring voice-over with a genuine accent. Sizzling sound of chicken frying. Casual background music.	[Official Ad on YouTube]

AD_09	KFC	"Friendship Bucket"	2017	Video Commercial	India	Friendship & Sharing	Slogan: "Dosti Masti aur bucket." (Friendship, Fun, and a Bucket). Voice-over about the joy of friendship.	A group of young Indian friends are shown having fun, taking selfies, and sharing a specially designed "Friendship Bucket."	Upbeat, Bollywood-style pop music. Energetic and youthful tone.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_10	KFC	"FCK" (Apology Ad)	2018	Print Ad	UK	Humor & Brand Persona	Text: Anagram "FCK" on a bucket. "We're sorry. A chicken restaurant without any chicken. It's not ideal."	Minimalist, stark visual. A single, empty KFC bucket with the brand's letters cleverly rearranged to look like an expletive.	N/A (Print Ad)	[Link to Ad Image]
AD_11	KFC	"Gravy Burger" (Man on a Slide)	2020	Video Commercial	UK	Pure Indulgence & Escape	Slogan: "The Gravy Burger. The absolute state of it." (Humorous, colloquial). No dialogue.	A man is shown sliding slowly and blissfully through a river of gravy, ending in a pool of it. Hyper-realistic and surreal.	Dramatic, operatic music that builds to a crescendo, creating a humorous contrast with the visuals.	[Official Ad on YouTube]

AD_12	KFC	"Love is in the Air"	2022	Video Commercial	South Africa	Romance & Indulgence	Slogan: "For the love of chicken." Dialogue: A couple sharing a romantic, playful moment over a KFC meal.	A stylish young couple on a date, sharing a bucket of KFC. Intimate setting, close-ups on their expressions and the food.	Smooth, romantic R&B background music. Sounds of soft laughter.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_13	McDonald's	"Pay with Lovin'" (Super Bowl Ad)	2015	Video Commercial	USA	Spontaneous Joy & Kindness	Cashier: "You can pay for your meal with some lovin'." Customers prompted to "call your mom and tell her you love her."	Genuine, emotional reactions of customers who are surprised. Hugs between family members, smiles, and laughter.	Upbeat, positive music that swells during emotional moments. Genuine sounds of laughter and happy surprise.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_14	McDonald's	"Arch Enemies"	2017	Video Commercial	UK	Friendship & Community	Slogan: "There's a McDonald's for everyone." (No dialogue).	Iconic rivals (Batman & Joker, Mario & Bowser, Grinch) are shown tentatively enjoying McDonald's together.	Playful, slightly mischievous music that builds a sense of camaraderie and resolution.	[Official Ad on YouTube]

AD_15	McDonald's	"Inner Child" (UK Christmas Ad)	2021	Video Commercial	UK	Family & Parent-Child Bonding	Song: "Time After Time" cover by Mabel. No dialogue.	A girl's imaginary friend from childhood reappears. She rediscovers her inner child and joy through a trip to McDonald's for "Reindeer Treats" (carrots).	A slow, emotional cover of a classic pop song, creating a nostalgic and heartwarming mood.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_16	McDonald's	"As Featured In"	2023	Video Commercial	Global	Nostalgia & Cultural Relevance	Slogan: "As Featured In." No dialogue. Mention of "Loki Season 2" as a tie-in.	Montage of clips from famous TV shows and movies (Seinfeld, The Office, Loki) where McDonald's is featured.	The iconic 5-note "ba da ba ba ba" jingle is integrated with sounds from the featured clips.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_17	McDonald's	"Raise Your Arches"	2023	Video Commercial	UK	Community & Spontaneous Connection	No dialogue. Slogan: "Wanna go to McDonald's?" shown at the end.	An entire office building wordlessly communicates the desire to go to McDonald's just by raising their eyebrows like the Golden Arches.	Upbeat, funky 80s track ("Oh Yeah" by Yello) that builds momentum and a sense of shared, fun rebellion.	[Official Ad on YouTube]

AD_18	McDonald's	"WcDonald's" (Anime Universe)	2024	Video Commercial / Digital	Global	Community & Fandom	Tagline: "WcDonald's. For all our fans." Dialogue is in Japanese with subtitles, mimicking anime style.	High-quality anime shorts featuring classic anime archetypes (mecha, fantasy) centered around the fictional "WcDonald's" restaurant.	High-energy J-pop and J-rock music. Professional anime voice acting.	[Official Ad on YouTube]
AD_19	KFC	"Mike's Hot Honey Collaboration"	2025	Video Commercial / Digital	USA	Indulgence & Novelty	Slogans: "Sweet heat is here," "Limited time." Name: "\$25 Fan Favorites Box." Focus on "drizzled."	Extreme close-ups of chicken glistening with honey, slow-motion drizzle. Bright red/orange colors to signify heat and flavor.	Upbeat, modern music. A slight "sizzle" or "buzzing" sound effect to represent the sweet heat combination.	Based on <i>The Daily Meal</i> article.
AD_20	McDonald's	"McValue Menu with John Cena"	2025	Video Commercial	USA	Value & Empowerment	Slogans: "Buy One, Add One for 1," "1," "1," "5 Meal Deal." John Cena's powerful but comedic delivery.	WWE star John Cena interacting with diverse customers, showing them the value deals in a bright, clean McDonald's interior.	Energetic, popular song. John Cena's recognizable voice. The classic McDonald's 5-note jingle.	Based on <i>Jestafreak</i> article.

AD_21	Coca-Cola	"Made Locally, Loved Globally"	2025 (Projected)	Video/Digital	Key markets like India	Authenticity & Local Pride	Voice-over: "The taste you love, from the people you know." Slogan: "Bottled with pride, right here."	Montage of local workers in a bottling plant, farmers, and community members enjoying Coke at local events. Emphasizes local sourcing and employment.	A blend of traditional local music with a modern, upbeat rhythm. Warm, genuine voice-over in the local language.	[Projected campaign based on geopolitical pressures and brand localization strategies mentioned in sources].
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