

# **A Visual Social Semiotic Approach to Environmental Advertisements**

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## **Abstract**

Environmental issues have become a worldwide concern, and huge sums of money are spent on initiatives that call for environmental preservation. This study is concerned with conducting a visual social semiotic analysis of two eco-themed advertisements representing animals (a polar bear and a monkey) suffering from environmental damage. The selected advertisements revolve around the concept that animals are our partners on this planet, and if they suffer from environmental damage, humans will be exposed to the same kind of suffering. The analysis is based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar model including representational, interactive and compositional metafunctions. The results show that Kress and van Leeuwen's model provides adequate tools for analyzing and understanding eco-themed advertisements. Creators of the selected advertisements appropriately exploit semiotic resources to highlight the importance of environmental awareness as well as the threats facing the inhabitants of this planet.

**Key Words:** *Visual Social Semiotics, Representational, Interactive, Compositional, Metafunctions*

## مدخل سيميائي اجتماعي بصري لدراسة الإعلانات البيئية

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### ملخص البحث باللغة العربية:

تستحوذ القضايا البيئية على اهتمام العالم، وتتفق أموال طائلة سنويا على مبادرات تهدف الى الحفاظ على البيئة. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى اجراء تحليل سيميائي اجتماعي بصري لاثنتين من الإعلانات المتعلقة بالشأن البيئي ممثلا في اثنتين من الحيوانات التي تعاني من دمار البيئة وهما الدب القطبي والقرود. وتتمحور فكرة الإعلانات المختارة على أن الحيوانات شركاء لنا في الكوكب ومعاونة الحيوانات من دمار البيئة ينتج عنه بالضرورة تعرض البشر لنفس نمط المعاناة. ولتحليل الإعلانين المختارين استخدمت الدراسة نموذج النحو البصري لكريس وفان ليوين حيث يشتمل هذا النموذج على ثلاث انواع من الوظائف السيميائية وهي وظيفة المعنى التمثيلي (Representational metafunction) ووظيفة المعنى التفاعلي (Interactive) ووظيفة المعنى التكويني (Compositional). وبينت نتائج الدراسة أن نموذج كريس وفان ليوين يقدم إطارا ملائما لفهم و تحليل الإعلانات ذات البعد البيئي. وبينت النتائج أيضا أن مبدعي هذه الإعلانات استخدموا الموارد السيميائية بشكل ملائم مما مكنهم من إظهار أهمية الوعي البيئي والمخاطر البيئية التي تهدد سكان هذا الكوكب.

## 1. Introduction

Advertisements are intended by their creators to convey various types of messages. In addition to advertising goods and services, advertisement can also be used to promote ideas, support human values, and enhance environmental issues. Moreover, advertisements are generously endowed with social values and cultural attitudes. In this regard, Williamson (1978) describes advertisements as "one of the most important cultural factors moulding and reflecting our life today" (p. 11). Accordingly, advertisements are considered a powerful tool which contributes largely to manipulating and shaping the behaviour of the target audience.

As far as semiotics is concerned, advertisements comprise numerous signs which communicate meanings and ideologies. Therefore, studying advertisements within the realm of semiotics is significant for understanding their effect on society as well as the way they construct reality and produce meaning and ideology. In this respect, Dyer (2009) perceives advertisements as structures of signs whose meanings depend mainly on the way in which signs and ideological effects are organized. Thus, as it is the case with languages, "advertisements can be analyzed semiotically as systems of signification" (p. 91).

Furthermore, Cook (2001) argues that advertising has recently changed. This is evident in the advertisers' tendency towards tackling contemporary issues related to environmental concerns. More importantly, the call for preserving the environment has increased nowadays due to the environmental damage which has swept through the globe. This has resulted in causing environmental awareness to be one of the recurring themes in advertisements. Many present-day advertisements revolve around eco-issues such as global warming, wildlife conservation, atmospheric pollution and energy efficiency.

Since preserving the environment is a worldwide concern, many

countries spend huge sums of money on initiatives that call forth a healthier environment. It is significant that researchers pay more attention to the way environmental issues are tackled in eco-themed advertisements. Utilising a visual social semiotic approach, the signs embodied in eco-themed advertisements can be decoded and their meanings can be interpreted.

## **2. Aim of the Study**

The objective of the current study is to explore how a visual social semiotic approach to environmental advertisements helps to comprehend cultural and ideological messages communicated through these advertisements. Specifically, this study aims to understand how advertisers create meaning and depict environmental issues through images. It sheds light on whether or not advertisers successfully use visual social semiotic resources to communicate messages concerning environmental issues.

## **3. Research Questions**

- 1- What is the significance of using representational metafunction analysis in the interpretation of environmental advertisements?
- 2- How can an interactive metafunctional analysis reveal the messages included in environmental advertisements?
- 3- How can a compositional metafunctional analysis of the arrangement of semiotic elements in environmental advertisements help to deliver the intended messages?
- 4- To what extent can a visual social semiotic approach contribute to revealing the cultural messages conveyed through environmental advertisements?

## **4. Literature Review**

Recent semiotic studies have concentrated mostly on the analysis of commercials promoting goods and services whereas research on environmental advertisements is comparatively insufficient. It has been noticed that there is a lack of studies which employ visual social semiotics to the analysis of environmental advertisements. Hence, this study examines how visual social

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semiotics can reveal the ideological and cultural messages communicated through eco-themed advertisements.

An example of the studies conducted on environmental advertisements is Giovanna's (2020) analysis of environmental public service advertising (henceforth PSA) including Chinese elements. The aim of her study is to explore whether advertising environmental discourses in non-Western countries, such as China, are becoming universal, or nationally and culturally specific. Giovanna conducts a social semiotic analysis centering around denotation and connotation. The findings of her study show that those eco-PSAs employ a number of culturally loaded elements which act as visual metaphors reinforcing environmental awareness along with national culture. The results also reveal that using specific cultural elements in eco-PSAs pave the way for a direct engagement with thoughts related to the environment as well as the threats facing both humans and animals.

Utilizing a visual social semiotic approach, Hasan (2015) investigates climate change and the risk messages of the environment in online Malaysian and German newspapers. He aims to comprehend how journalists use pictures to create meaning of environmental risks. Hasan relies on Kress & van Leeuwen's (2001) visual social semiotics, specifically the interpersonal metafunction. He concludes that there are a few stories which are related to climate change risk. His findings reveal that both Malaysian and German journalists employ similar signs to depict climate change. Malaysian journalists represent this risk as a threat and danger whereas German journalists portray it as a choice.

Above all, environmental messages disseminated through eco-themed advertisements need to be thoroughly investigated. In this regard, the present study focuses mainly on the analysis of advertisements tackling environmental issues. Previously conducted research on environmental advertising mostly centered on examining discourse by means of discourse analysis and content analysis. Therefore, this study adopts a different perspective by

examining how meaning is conveyed through visual social semiotic resources embedded in environmental advertisements. Despite the significant increase in the studies of environmental issues in the media, attention is primarily given to the analysis of texts rather than images. Rarely do researchers examine eco-themed advertisements from a visual social semiotic approach.

## 5. Theoretical Framework

This study is based mainly on Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) visual social semiotic approach which encompasses three metafunctions: representational, interactive and compositional.

### 5.1. Social Semiotics

Social semiotics is a multidisciplinary approach to the study of semiotics. A key term in the field of social semiotics is 'semiotic resource' which is defined by van Leeuwen (2005) as "the actions and artefacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically...or by means of technologies. Traditionally they were called 'signs'" (p. 3). Semiotic resources are not confined to speech and writing. That is, everything we do can allow the articulation of various social and cultural meanings. van Leeuwen further indicates that a semiotic resource has a semiotic potential—the types of meanings the semiotic resource affords.

Social semiotics is mainly influenced by Halliday's functional theory of language which deals with syntax as a resource for social interaction rather than a system of formal rules. As Halliday (2014) puts it, the grammar of a language is a resource for making meanings. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) assume that Halliday's ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions can be fulfilled by all semiotic systems in visual communication.

van Leeuwen (2005) postulates four major dimensions of social semiotic analysis: discourse, genre, style and modality. Discourses are social semiotic resources for constructing representations of some aspect of reality. They act as frameworks for conveying meaning about the 'what' of communication. The concept of genre means a type of text. From the point of view of social semiotics,

genre focuses primarily on the function of texts in that it is concerned with the 'how' of communication. Style refers to the way whereby people use semiotic resources to express their values and identities. Advertising style, for instance, is not only utilised to sell products but to model the values of consumer society as well. As regards modality, van Leeuwen asserts that it is closely related to truth. It is the social semiotic approach to how semiotic resources are used for creating the truth. It is linked to issues of representing reality versus fantasy, authentic versus fake, and fact versus fiction. Modality is also interested in the truth as seen by sign producers, speakers and writers.

## **5.2. Visual Social Semiotics**

Jewitt & Oyama (2012) state that social semiotics of visual communication is concerned with "the description of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images...and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted" (p. 134). Drawing on Halliday's (1978) systemic functional grammar, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) propound the theory of visual grammar. As maintained by Halliday (1978), every semiotic resource fulfills three basic functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) state that the ideational function represents "the world around and inside us" (p. 15). They further explain that it refers to the ability of any semiotic resource to show objects together with their relations in a semiotically represented world. In this sense, semiotic resources provide a number of different choices by which the relations between objects can be depicted.

Pertaining to the interpersonal metafunction, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) assert that social interactions and social relations can be represented via images. They claim that any semiotic resource should be able to depict the social relationship between the sign producer, the viewer and the represented object. Textual metafunction, according to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) shows coherence among all elements of the text in that any semiotic resource has to be capable of forming coherent texts.

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize that both language and visual communication are means of realizing the same systems of meaning forming our cultures. Adopting the term 'metafunction' from Halliday, Kress & van Leeuwen argue that any semiotic resource can fulfill three metafunctions: representational, interactive and compositional which are analogues to Halliday's ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions respectively.

### **5.2.1. The representational metafunction**

The representational metafunction refers to how our experience is encoded visually. In this regard, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) use the term 'participants' rather than 'objects' to refer to what is represented in an image. They differentiate between two types of participants: represented and interactive. The former refers to the participants that are depicted in images or represented by speech or writing. The latter include the participants who make images or the ones in the act of communication. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) differentiate between two basic types of processes of visual representation: narrative and conceptual.

#### **5.2.1.1. Narrative processes**

Narrative processes must include a vector connecting the represented participants. To put it another way, in a narrative image, participants are portrayed as doing something. Jewitt & Oyama (2012) define the vector in terms of a line which is often diagonal and relates participants to each other. The participant who or which the vector departs from is called the Actor. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) put forward various kinds of narrative processes on the basis of the types of vectors along with the number of participants. Examples of the types of narrative processes are action, reactional and circumstances.

#### **Action processes**

Action process consists of an Actor—the most salient participant from whom or which the vector emanates—and a Goal—the participant that the vector is directed at. In case there is an Actor without a Goal, the resulting action process is non-



transactional. If there are both an Actor and a Goal, this constitutes a transactional action process.

### **Reactional processes**

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) elucidate that the vector of a reactional process is created by an eyeline. The participant that does the act of looking is termed the Reacter; the participant whom or which the Reacter is gazing at is the Phenomenon. Gestures and facial expressions can “‘colour in’ the nature of the reaction as pleased or displeased, deferential or defiant" (Jewitt & Oyama, 2012, p. 144). Kress & van Leeuwen state that reactional processes can be either transactional or non-transactional. The former consists of a Reacter and a Phenomenon, whereas the latter includes a Reacter only.

### **Circumstances**

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) argue that in this type of processes, there are main and secondary participants whose relationship is not represented by vectors. They are depicted as distinct participants. In this case, their relation is described as a Circumstance of Accompaniment. Participants may be portrayed as being related to a Setting where there is a contrast between the background and the foreground.

#### **5.2.1.2. Conceptual processes**

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize that conceptual processes do not have vectors in that they represent the class, structure, or meaning of participants. These processes can be classificational, analytical, or symbolic. Classificational processes connect participants with each other through a taxonomy. One participant plays the role of a Superordinate to whom other subordinates are related. In analytical processes, the relationship between participants is described as a part-whole structure involving two types of participants: a Carrier referring to the whole, and Possessive Attributes acting as the parts. Symbolic processes show the meaning of a participant. They comprise a

Carrier and Symbolic Attribute. The former is the participant whose identity or meaning is represented. The latter is the participant representing the identity or meaning. Symbolic Attributes are salient in various ways such as being positioned in the foreground, or being portrayed in sharp focus or fine detail.

### **5.2.2. The interactive metafunction**

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) argue that visual communication has semiotic resources for maintaining interaction between producers and viewers of images. Jewitt & Oyama (2012) point out that "[i]mages can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame....they interact with viewers and suggest the attitude viewers should take towards what is being represented" (p. 147). Interactive meanings can be realized by means of the system of gaze, size of frame and social distance, and perspective.

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) assert that the interactive resources of visual communication comprise three major semiotic systems: contact, social distance and attitude. They also suggest that visual modality can be one of the tools of creating interactive meanings.

#### **5.2.2.1. Contact**

In terms of the system of gaze, represented participants can be depicted as either looking directly at the viewer or as not communicating with the viewer. Based on Halliday's (1985) distinction between demand and offer, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) describe images where the represented participant gazes at the viewer as 'demand'; whereas images in which no contact is made between the represented participant and the viewer as 'offer'.

#### **5.2.2.2. Social distance**

Based on the size of frame and social distance, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) and Hall (1966) explicate that represented participants can be depicted as close to the viewer or as far away from him or her and hence as strangers. Consequently, they relate the size of frame to three major types of shots: close, medium and

long. The close shot shows the represented participant's head and shoulders; anything less than that is referred to as an extreme close-up. In the medium shot, the represented participant is nearly shown at the knees; the medium close shot displays the represented participant approximately at the waist. The long shot portrays the represented participant as occupying roughly half of the frame; the medium long shot reveals the full figure. The very long shot displays anything wider than that.

### **5.2.2.3. Attitude**

The system of perspective or attitude is one of the visual semiotic resources by which relations between the represented participant and the viewer is brought about. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) explain that perspective involves the choice of an angle or more precisely a point of view. They illustrate that the represented participant can be photographed from a horizontal angle or a vertical angle. The horizontal angle involves the distinction between two points of view: frontal and oblique. The former creates a sense of involvement with the viewer while the latter constitutes a sense of detachment from the viewer. From a vertical angle perspective, the represented participant can be photographed from a high or low angle or at eye level. The high angle causes the represented participant to be shown as small and insignificant. The low angle makes the represented participant look imposing and more significant. Kress & van Leeuwen relate the vertical angle to the notion of power. In other words, the high angle allows the viewer to have symbolic power over the represented participant. The low angle makes the represented participant look powerful. The eye-level angle signifies a sense of equality between the viewer and the represented participant.

### **5.2.2.4. Visual modality**

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) maintain that the concept of modality is connected with credibility or reliability of messages. From a social semiotic point of view, visual modality determines whether what is viewed is true or fiction. Visuals can depict the

represented participants as real or as imaginings and fantasies. Kress & van Leeuwen point out that the defining criterion for deciding whether what is represented is true or not is based primarily on the correspondence of the appearance of things to naturalism. There are varying degrees of modality in that images can have a high or low degree of modality. Additionally, images can be portrayed as more than real or less than real on the basis of a number of modality markers such as colour, contextualization, representation, depth, illumination and brightness.

### **5.2.3. The compositional metafunction**

van Leeuwen (2005) describes composition as the arrangements of elements on a semiotic space such as a screen or a page. He elucidates that pictorial elements are balanced with respect to their visual weight which stems from their salience. He adds that the composition gives elements a specific value and illustrates how they are related to each other. As Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) put it, the compositional metafunction is connected with how both the representational and interactive meanings constitute a meaningful whole. This is realized through three interrelated systems: information value, salience and framing.

#### **5.2.3.1. Information value**

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) state that the placement of compositional elements endows them with different information values. When images employ the horizontal axis by placing some elements on the left and the others on the right, the former are presented as Given, which means that they are already known by the viewer. The latter are presented as New and hence as something that is not agreed upon by the viewer and in this sense requires special attention from him or her. In case of the vertical axis whereby elements are positioned at the top and at the bottom, the top represents the Ideal and the bottom acts as the Real. The Ideal is shown as the most salient part which carries the essence of the information while the Real presents more specific information. Furthermore, images can be structured along centre and margin dimensions. The elements in the middle are termed Centre and are

therefore regarded as the nucleus of information. The elements positioned around the centre are called Margins and thus are dependent and very similar to each other.

### 5.2.3.2. Saliency

Saliency makes some elements more important and more eye-catching than others. van Leeuwen (2005) explicates that saliency stems from a number of factors such as size, sharpness of focus, colour contrasts, perspective and placement in the visual field. In essence, saliency is achieved through anything resulting in an element to stand out in the representation.

### 5.2.3.3. Framing

Framing illustrates that "elements of a composition can either be given separate identities, or represented as belonging together" (Jewitt & Oyama, 2012, p. 153). That is, represented participants can be portrayed as connected to or disconnected from each other. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) indicate that connection is realized through the use of vectors and repetition of colours. Disconnection is created by means of frame lines, empty space, or discontinuities of colour. Kress & van Leeuwen further add that if an element is strongly framed, it is thus considered a separate unit of information.

## 6. Data and Procedures

The data of the current research consist of two print advertisements. The first is selected from one of the series of posters which are part of the Wildlife campaign launched by WWF Denmark (<https://petapixel.com/2014/04/14/world-wildlife-fund-uses-snapchat-for-unique-lastsselfie-campaign-to-bring-awareness-to-endangered-animals/>). This advertising campaign comprises three print advertisements featuring three wildlife animals: a polar bear, a lion, and a chimpanzee. The three animals are portrayed in the same way covering their eyes with their hands, and accompanied by the verbal caption: "WHAT ON EARTH ARE WE DOING TO OUR PLANET?"

The second is one of two print advertisements created by Ford Brazil for environmental conservation awards

(<https://creativecriminals.com/print/ford/environmental-conservation-award>). The two advertisements creatively depict animals and humans as one entity. The slogan of the campaign is "THOSE WHO HELP NATURE END UP HELPING THEMSELVES". The advertisement under study features the face of a monkey painted on a man's face. Their mouths are merged into one which is widely open to eat a banana offered by the man's hand.

As this study relies on Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) representational, interpersonal and compositional metafunctions, these three phases of analysis are traced in each of the two selected advertisements to find out the extent to which the intended messages are successfully delivered.

## 7. Analysis

### 7.1. The first advertisement: (WWF Campaign)



Fig. 1: Polar bear advertisement:  
(<https://petapixel.com/2014/04/14/world-wildlife-fund-uses-snapchat-for-unique-lastselfie-campaign-to-bring-awareness-to-endangered-animals/>)



### 7.1.1. The representational metafunction analysis

In terms of representation, there are two types of processes in this advertisement. The first is an action process whose vector is created by the gesture of the hands of the polar bear covering its eyes. Therefore, the polar bear plays the role of an Actor in a non-transactional action process. Thus, the viewer is made to imagine what the Goal of this action process is. This signifies that the polar bear is too angry and confused to see what is happening in the environment. Moreover, this action process shows that the polar bear is embarrassed and annoyed at the destruction that is brought about to the environment. This meaning is reinforced by the use of the expression "WHAT ON EARTH" which signifies extreme surprise, anger and confusion about something. The action process also shows that the polar bear does not want to communicate with the viewer. The second is a symbolic process since the polar bear is depicted as salient in the representation by means of its placement in the foreground in addition to its portrayal in fine detail. These two processes convey to the viewer that this very species of animals is suffering from and afraid of the mass destruction which threatens its existence on earth.

### 7.1.2. The interactive metafunction analysis

Relating to the semiotic system of contact, this advertisement is an offer image in which there is no direct contact between the represented participant and the viewer. Although the polar bear faces the viewer frontally, it covers its eyes; thereby signifying its desire not to communicate with the viewer. To put it another way, the polar bear is displayed as an object of contemplation and the viewer is positioned as an observer only. In this sense, the viewer is asked to pay special attention to the visual affliction and anguish of the polar bear.

As for the semiotic system of social distance, the polar bear is photographed from a close-up shot revealing its head and two hands on its eyes while the remaining part of its body has already drowned in the sea as a result of the melted ice. The close-up shot

portrays the polar bear as sending the message that the viewer will experience the same sense of suffering as the polar bear. The way the polar bear is thus represented creates a close personal relationship between it and the viewer.

Pertaining to the semiotic system of attitude, the polar bear is shown from a frontal angle from the point of view of horizontality. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) describe the frontal angle as the angle of maximum involvement which is oriented towards action. In this respect, photographing the polar bear from a frontal angle entails that what is seen in the image is part of our world and hence requires that the viewer try with might and main to rescue this species of animals from deterioration and extinction. As a result, a strong sense of involvement is created between the polar bear and the viewer who is supposed to react to the suffering of this species which is about to die out. That is, the viewer is caused to be involved with what the polar bear experiences. From a vertical angle perspective, the polar bear is photographed from a high angle reflecting the symbolic power the viewer has over it. It also makes the polar bear within reach and at the viewer's command. This signifies the helplessness of the polar bear which is at risk due to what is being done to the planet. This angle also enables the viewer to see the deteriorating state of the polar bear which is about to drown in the sea.

As regards visual modality, the advertisement employs natural modality which adds to the credibility of the message conveyed through it. This is shown through the markers of visual modality including colour, contextualization, representation and illumination. As for colours, they are fully saturated and modulated, reflecting reality. Concerning contextualization, it is shown via the presence of a defined setting (the melted ice) which increases the degree of natural modality. In terms of representation, the polar bear, together with the sea, is depicted as real since its appearance resembles the way it is viewed in reality except that it hides its eyes out of its embarrassment, fear and anguish. Besides, the polar bear is portrayed in great detail, displaying strands of the hair of its hands. Regarding illumination, it is shown in the play of



light and the varying degrees of brightness of the colour of the sea.

### 7.1.3. The compositional metafunction analysis

As far as composition is concerned, the advertisement includes an image and a verbal text with the latter occupying small space of the image. Both the visual and the verbal text integrate into forming the message of the advertisement. As to information value, the advertisement is structured along the horizontal axis in that the polar bear is placed on the left and the text on the right. What the polar bear feels is presented as Given and the verbal text as New. In other words, the misery and discomfort of polar bears is self-evident and already known to humans; however, they still ignore this species and continue destroying the environment where it lives. That is why, the verbal text is positioned to the right as New and hence as the core of the message, for what humans are doing to the planet is the problem which needs urgent solution.

From the point of view of salience, the polar bear stands out in the representation since it is the only represented participant in the advertisement. It is also given salience by means of its size, placement in the visual field and perspective. In spite of being presented as Given, the polar bear is made to be more eye-catching than the verbal text. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) explain that the further elements are moved towards the left, the heavier they appear. Therefore, placing the polar bear on the left causes it to be more worthy of attention than the verbal caption.

In terms of framing, there is connection between the polar bear and the text. Colour repetition, for instance, creates a degree of connection which is shown in the white colour of the text rhyming with the colour of the white skin of the polar bear. In addition, the image of the polar bear and the text occupy the same semiotic space. van Leeuwen (2005) refers to this type of framing as pictorial integration which describes the text integrating into the pictorial space. Connection is also realized by the gesture of the polar bear covering its eyes and the expression "WHAT ON EARTH" which together convey the same sense of surprise and

anger at the destruction of the environment. In this case, the polar bear and the text are depicted as complementary and as a single unit of information. To put it another way, the polar bear is represented as though it is the one that directs the question to the viewer, thereby demanding that there be an end to the devastation of the environment.

## 7.2. The second advertisement: (Environmental Conservation Award)



**Fig.2:** Monkey painted on a man's face  
(<https://creativecriminals.com/print/ford/environmental-conservation-award>)

### 7.2.1. The representational metafunction analysis

This advertisement is a narrative image including two action processes and one reactional process. The first action process is evident in the man's hand holding a banana in the direction of the monkey's open mouth which is painted on the man's face as a sign of close communion with nature. The result is a transactional action process whose Actor is the man's hand and whose Goal is

the banana. This process acts as a Phenomenon to a transactional reactional process created by the eyeline vector emanating from the monkey's eye towards the man's hand holding the banana. This reactional process is highlighted by the man's and monkey's facial expressions. The man's facial expression along with its closed eye signifies the state of peace of mind which humans will feel out of their help to animals. The monkey's facial expression reflects its hunger and bad need for help. The second action process is formed by the gesture of the open mouth which is aimed at the banana. The open mouth is an Actor in a transactional action process whose Goal is the banana. The message conveyed through the aforementioned processes is that by helping nature, we are helping ourselves. On the whole, the advertisement communicates to the viewer that human beings should devote careful attention to animals since any harm caused to animals will adversely affect humans themselves. This message is enhanced by the tagline "THOSE WHO HELP NATURE END UP HELPING THEMSELVES". By framing the word "NATURE" and underlining the word "HELPING", the advertiser conveys to the viewer that environmental conservation should be one of the principal concerns of any human being.

### 7.2.2. The interactive metafunction analysis

Concerning the system of gaze, this advertisement presents an offer image where the two represented participants are not communicating with the viewer. The full attention of both the man and the monkey is given to eating the banana. Accordingly, the represented participants are offered to the viewer as information to be fully comprehended. For instance, the viewer is required to scrutinize how animals need to be helped by humans.

Looking at the advertisement from the point of view of social distance, the two represented participants are captured with an extreme close-up shot displaying their faces only. This results in making the represented participants appear as though they are our friends. As a consequence, an intimate relationship is created

between them and the viewer. Above all, portraying the represented participants as very close to the viewer entails that he or she will feel the same sense of relief in case of providing aid for nature.

On the basis of attitude, this advertisement is photographed from an oblique angle with regard to the horizontal angle perspective. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) opine that photographing an image from an oblique angle implies that what is seen is neither presented as part of our world nor as something we are involved with. In this regard, the encoded message is that those who actually aid animals are very few to the extent that they are depicted as not being included within our world. This emphasizes the idea of human negligence to the environment. As far as the vertical dimension is concerned, this advertisement is photographed from a low angle signifying the power of the represented participants over the viewer. This angle makes the represented participants look larger and imposing. In other words, it denotes the superiority of humans who help animals as a means of conserving the environment.

Pertaining to visual modality, this advertisement makes a significant use of fully saturated and modulated colours which contribute greatly to getting its message across to the viewer. First, the monkey and the banana are the only elements that are portrayed with their natural colours. This entails that the major focus is centered around them. Second, the predominant use of the green colour is a sign of nature and the environment where the monkey lives. Although colouring the man's skin in green makes him seem unreal, it stresses the sense of harmony that is supposed to exist between humans and animals. Third, the green colour of the background and the man's face denotes that humans should provide animals with a healthy and peaceful environment devoid of pollution or any other means of destruction. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) point out that the realization of modality includes a composite interplay of visual cues which causes an image to be abstract in respect to one or more markers and naturalistic in relation to others. Therefore, this advertisement is abstract (less than real) in terms of contextualization and naturalistic in terms of

representation. On the one hand, there is no defined setting and the background is plain. The decontextualized background leads to drawing the viewer's attention to the represented participants themselves rather than lowering the degree of visual modality. On the other hand, the advertisement depicts each bit of detail of the two represented participants. For example, the man's hand and face are shown in fine detail revealing the pores in his skin and his under-eye wrinkles and hence increasing the degree of naturalistic modality. Likewise, the varying degrees of the brown colour of the monkey's hair enhances naturalistic modality.

### 7.2.3. The compositional metafunction analysis

This advertisement combines an image with verbal text which is one of the compositional elements collaborating with other visual semiotic resources in getting the message across to the viewer. With reference to information value, the composition of the advertisement makes use of the horizontal axis. The verbal text and the man's hand holding the banana are positioned on the left as Real, hence as agreed upon and commonsensical. The man's face together with the monkey's face painted on it is placed on the right as Ideal and therefore as the key information. Consequently, the viewer is required to ponder how the monkey needs humans' help.

With respect to salience, the most striking elements in the representation are the monkey and the banana. Both of them are made salient via colour differentiation and modulation. For instance, the monkey is portrayed in fully modulated colours unlike the man who is depicted in plain, unmodulated green. Additionally, being presented as New causes the monkey to be more worthy of attention. As to the verbal text, the words "NATURE" and "HELPING" are given salience through being framed and underlined respectively. Nonetheless, the image is more eye-catching than the text. This suggests that this advertisement attempts to make viewers notice the attractive image first, thereby highlighting the importance of nature conservation.

Regarding framing, the man and the monkey are represented as closely belonging together. This prominent and creative sense of

connection between the two represented participants is realized in numerous ways, namely the existence of vectors and similarities of colour. First, the man's hand forms a vector directed towards the monkey's mouth. Second, the monkey's face and the man's are depicted as one integrated whole. Third, the green colour of the man's skin and the background instills a palpable sense of harmony and coherence with nature. Fourth, the absence of framing devices boosts connection. There is also another kind of connection between the entire image and the verbal text since they do not occupy distinct domains. That is, the semiotic space is related to the image and the text is placed inside this space, and hence creating pictorial integration.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study examines two print environmental advertisements. The first, created by wildlife campaign in Deanark, portrays the suffering of wildlife animals from environmental destruction caused by humans. The second, launched by Ford, signifies the importance of helping nature as a means of helping humans themselves. The main aim of the study is to investigate how applying a visual social semiotic approach to eco-themed advertisements helps to fully understand the messages conveyed through them. It also examines how advertisers utilize images to depict environmental issues, and whether they succeed in using visual social semiotic resources to get the message across to the viewer.

The first research question addresses the role of representational metafunction analysis in interpreting environmental advertisements. Findings reveal that the types of processes used in the two advertisements denote various meanings. The first advertisement includes narrative and conceptual processes. The former signifies the state of anger and embarrassment of polar bears at the destruction of the environment. The latter emphasizes the sense of suffering polar bears feel due to environmental damage. The second advertisement contains the two types of narrative processes which highlight the significance of communion



with nature, for any damage to nature affects both animals and humans.

The second research question is related to understanding environmental advertisements in the light of interactive semiotic resources. Findings show that the represented participants in the two advertisements are offered to the viewer as objects of contemplation and thus assigning the viewer the role of an observer who is required to devote undivided attention to them. The two advertisements are photographed from a close-up shot, thereby establishing a close personal relationship with the viewer. That is, animals are depicted as our partners on the planet, which entails that humans will experience the same sense of suffering and deterioration as animals in case of causing any harm to the environment. The first advertisement is captured with a frontal, high angle signifying involvement and symbolic power over the represented participant. This shows that the viewer has to be involved with what the helpless polar bear feels. The second advertisement is photographed from an oblique, low angle denoting detachment and power over the viewer. This signifies the scarcity and, at the same time, superiority of humans helping nature. The two advertisements make significant use of visual modality markers which increase the degree of their modality and reinforce their credibility. This is evident in the depiction of the represented participants in fine detail as well as colour saturation and modulation.

The third research question is about the role played by compositional semiotic resources in the comprehension of environmental advertisements. Analysis shows that the two advertisements use the Given-New structure with regard to information value. Saliency is given mainly to images rather than verbal text. As for framing, pictorial integration creates connection between images and text, thereby emphasizing the message encoded within the two advertisements.

The fourth research question discusses the extent to which visual social semiotics reveals the messages communicated

through environmental advertisements. The aforementioned findings of the study prove the effectiveness of applying a visual social semiotic approach to the analysis of eco-themed advertisements. This is shown in the collaboration of the different representational, interactive and compositional semiotic resources in creating meaning.

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