

A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LOGOS OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL BODIES

Gift N. Okata (PhD)

Associate Professor, Department of Languages and Literary Studies,
Babcock University Nigeria

Email: okatag@babcock.edu.ng

&

Michael Mofeoluwa OLADIPO

Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Babcock University

Email: oladipo0253@pg.babcock.edu.ng

Abstract

The medical professional bodies of Nigeria constitute the bedrock of the nation's healthcare. This paper conducts a semiotic analysis of selected logos of medical professional bodies in Lagos with the aim of uncovering the contextual interpretations and representations. Deploying Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar as the theoretical framework and the descriptive qualitative method of analysis, the study analyses twelve (12) logos of medical professional bodies, purposively selected from their official websites. The analysis espouses the significance of the graphics, writing, colour, and symbol of the selected logos. The study reveals that the logos of medical professional bodies incorporate symbols representing qualities like strength, administration, knowledge, healing and oneness. This suggests that these professional bodies aim to convey a sense of power, healthcare, surveillance and commitment through their visual identities. This paper therefore concludes that the usage of semiotic resources holds a level of prominence, significance and relevance in Nigerian healthcare issues. As a result of its findings, the research strongly recommends the incorporation of semiotic analyses as a vital instrument of addressing and managing health-related issues.

Keywords: Language; logos; professional body; semiotics; visual grammar.

Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in enhancing professionalism and ethical balance among members of every profession. It is essential for effective communication within the professional domain. Oladipo (2020, p. 94) asserts that "Language is a powerful tool in human communication. Language is a tool for communication, and it is powerful in every human society." Okata (2016, p. 171) defines language as "the vehicle that transports feelings emotions, ideas, thoughts processes etc from one entity to another. This could be sign language, written language, body language and other paralinguistic means of communication which must be acceptable by members of a community for the purpose of communication." It is a veritable tool for every human in language. Language can further be described as the means by which members of a speech community use voluntarily placed sign and symbols to communicate or relay information from a speaker to a listener or from a writer to a target audience (listeners).

A prominent definition of language by Sapir (1921, p. 6) is that "language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily

placed symbols” This definition captures the symbolic feature of human language as symbols are important means of expressing oneself especially in the area of non-verbal communication. These symbols are exemplified in logos, images, pictures, emojis, graphics and statues.

The study of the use of signs and symbols is a field that explores how semiotic resources employed by users of language create an impression, trademark or identity. According to Oladejo (2021, p. 170), “Human beings use signs for different reasons in order to achieve diverse goals in health, entertainment politics, education, etc. Human beings usually communicate different ideas and messages in different fields.” Semiotic resources in terms of signs, symbols, pictures, graphics and gestures are used in all fields such as entertainment, sport, business, medicine, agriculture, religion etc. In various disciplines, these signs and symbols are reflected in logos. Every logo has a perceptive power on the viewers based on the socio-cultural or religious background.

This present study, therefore, examines selected logos of medical professional bodies in Nigeria with a focus on the relevance of these symbols to the socio-cultural perception of members of the public. Timehin (2022, p. 118) states that “Any image, object, sound, action, concept, or word capable of representing something else is understood to be a sign.”

Literature Review

Over the years, analysis in Semiotic studies especially in Nigeria has focused on the media discourse- print advertisements, electronic advertisements and comics and word-signs. Such studies include Cheo, & Julius (2023), Rehab (2023), Akinmusuyi (2022), Igwedibia (2021), Oparinde (2018), Chimuanya and Abioye (2017) Adrea (2016), Itanghi, and Adeniji (2016); Igwebuikwe, Ademilokun and Olateju (2015), thereby restricting the scope of Semiotics and multimodal analysis to political discourse in either in printed or electronic. Akinmusuyi (2022, p. 5) opines that “Hodge and Kress provide various examples from diverse social contexts involving different modes of communication with a primary focus in writing and visual elements in print media like magazines and billboards.” This work is in line with Akinmusuyi’s position of semiotics being a framework that thrives fully well on the print media in terms of images, motion pictures and many others. In order to bridge the gap of this linguistic study of Semiotic analysis, this study elucidates the semiotic resources used in the logos of selected Nigerian medical professional bodies and how they complement the linguistic modes to enhance meaning and interpretation.

Logos

Onipede (2018, p. 61) avers that logos are patterned in a special way to communicate effectively. They are designed to persuade and influence people”. Logos are generally made up of signs, symbols, pictures and graphics intentionally patterned by an individual, religious organization, manufacturer or professional group in order to create a trademark or aid distinction from other groups. According to Tahririan and Sadri (2013, p. 53), “It is obvious that pictures convey information more effectively and efficiently than words do.” Readers/viewers make meaning from visuals and graphics clearly than word. Anytime a viewer or reader comes across a picture, he or she can ascribe the intended meaning interpretations or emotional attachment. A written text devoid of visual components like signs, symbols could be difficult for an illiterate or unfamiliar reader to comprehend and reply an intended message.

Kelly (2017, p. 18), defines logo as “an instrument that articulates the meaning of a brand in relation to other corporate Semiotics that gives meaning to its visual sign. Based on definition it is evident that a logo is a vital semiotic resource.” A logo is defined as a distinct symbolic or graphic form of visual communication specifically designed to convey vital information about its users. Logos have their interpretations structured in line with the pictures objects and images represented. These logos have a way of shaping public opinion as well as keeping the services of the users in check.

The logos employed by Nigerian professional bodies give each profession a precise identity by signifying that professionals within such profession are responsible and committed to providing essential services to members of the general public. For instance, anyone who walks into the environment of a professional organization is welcomed by certain symbolic representations strategically positioned to give such an individual a clear perception of what is being communicated.

Theoretical framework

For this study, the theoretical position employed is Visual Grammar developed by Gunther Kress and Theo Leeuwen (2006). This framework is rooted in the Systemic Functional Linguistics proposed by Michael Halliday (1978). Halliday identifies three metafunctions of language which are ideational, interpersonal and textual. For Halliday, language is seen as a product of social practice. According to Akinmusuyi (2022, p. 4), “This approach has subsequently evolved into a theory of creating multimodal signs through the contributions of Robert Hodge in, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen. This is because the theory is connected to symbolic interactionism.” This theory vividly accounts for the visual aspect of language as it accounts for the symbolic/pictorial use of language in which objects are representational.

Suku (2019, p. 3) explains that “this is a framework that considers visual designs as a grammar which describes the way semiotic elements-images, colours, pictures sounds are combined in visual statements to produce meaning”. The framework is primarily concerned with how special semiotic resources like logos, colours, images, objects and graphics are employed to enhance meaning or create an impression. It focuses on the deployment of visual strategies in enhancing meaning. Kress and Leeuwen (2006, p. 1) reveal that “social semiotics provides usable descriptions of major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in Western visual Semiotics and to analyse how they are used to produce meaning...”

Therefore, this paper examines and analyses selected logos of Nigerian medical professional bodies. It investigates the intended meaning of the selected logos, the systematic composition of the logos and the patterns of representation adopted by each of the selected medical professional bodies. This is borne out of the need to shift away from static texts like newspapers, print advertisements, cover pages of literature books and cinema productions that have been the major areas of focus of semiotic analysis and give attention to logos of selected medical professional bodies with reference to how meanings are constituted.

Methodology

The descriptive qualitative method of analysis is employed in order to foreground the hidden messages of the selected logos of the medical professional bodies operating in Nigeria. This is in

consonance with the works of Moleong (2003) on descriptive qualitative method of research. The data for analysis are downloaded and retrieved from the official websites of the selected medical professional bodies. All the logos of medical professional bodies within Lagos constitute the research population. To enrich the range of perspectives for analysis, only twelve (12) logos are selected from the numerous medical professional bodies in Lagos State (population) using the purposive random sampling technique. The research will label each of the snapshots (logos) datum 1-12.

The choice of 12 medical professional agency logos was precipitated by the desire to carry out a detailed analysis. The study focuses on the logos of selected medical professional bodies operating within Nigeria and not the names of the association. Although the semiotic analysis will not include the evaluation of the services or slogans rendered by these professional bodies, it is based on the relevance of the logos to the work ethics of the selected medical professional bodies.

A list of the selected logos is given below:

1. Nigeria Association of Social Workers
2. Nigeria Medical Association
3. Nigeria Midwifery and Nursing Council
4. Lagos State Health Management Agency
5. Paediatric Association of Nigeria
6. Nigerian Veterinary Medical Association
7. Association of Young Health Information Manager Professional
8. Association of Dental Technologists of Nigeria
9. National Association of Resident Doctors
10. Hospital Equipment and Medical Devices Dealers Association of Nigeria
11. Community Health Practitioners
12. National Association of Public Health Practitioners

Datum 1



NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Theme- The theme of this logo is humanitarian service

Symbols- Map, two hands, Nigerians, crest and Nigerian map

Colours—Green, White, navy blue

Contextual Interpretation- This logo suggests that the mandate of this association is to render humanitarian services to the general public. Looking at the logo critically, the persons inscribed in the Nigerian map represent Nigerians all over the six geo-political zones of the country. This image depicts the diverse ethnic groups as well as the multilingual nature of Nigeria. All the popular ethnic groups are fully represented in this logo. The two hands carrying the map showcases the communal interest of the association. The two hands show that the association considers human health delicate and important hence it should be handled with extra caution. It reinforces the fact that social services rendered by this body to the public are devoid of ethnicity, tribalism, region, religious

differences, gender beliefs, custom and geographical locations. The green and white colours indicate that the professional body is Nigerian-based and the choice of navy blue here suggests authority and professionalism.

Datum 2



NIGERIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Theme- The theme is medicine or healthcare

Symbols- Y-shaped pole and curled Snake

Colour—Green and white

Contextual Interpretation- The symbol here suggests the medicinal/healing power of a snake. The use of a snake resting on the Y-like pole is opposed to the general connotation of a snake symbolizing deceit, evil, ill-luck etc. Here, the snake connotes healing, cure or transformation. The archetypal depiction of the healing power of a snake is extrapolated scripturally (Numbers 21: 8) in which Moses set a bronze serpent on a pole for anyone bitten to look upon. Similarly, in medicine today it is believed that the venom extracted from snakes are medicinal when added to the chemical component of certain tablets or syrups which can be used to cure several ailment, diseases or viruses. In essence the association is concerned with health status and its improvement in Nigeria generally. Similarly, this datum incorporates the colours green and white to show that this association is Nigerian based.

Datum 3



NURSING AND MIDWIFERY COUNCIL OF NIGERIA

Theme—The theme of childbirth and care is presented here.

Symbols—Woman, baby, leaves, kettle, map, root

Colours—Green, white and navy blue

Contextual Interpretation—The woman and the baby in this logo reveal that members of this profession are committed to antenatal, natal and postnatal medical services. Nurses and midwives are responsible for taking care of nursing mothers, pregnant women as well as newborn babies. The kettle-like item on the right side of the logo reflects the prenatal, natal and postnatal activities like warm bath, immunization, hormonal injections, hot water used during the period of childbirth. The map is coloured green and white representing the nationality of the profession, which is Nigeria. The green leaves above depict fertility and freshness while the white colour symbolizes the transparency of the council.

Datum 4



LAGOS STATE HEALTH MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Theme—The theme of this logo is healthcare

Symbols—Lagos state emblem, human figures and addition symbol

Colours—Orange, yellow, red white, lemon, and blue

Contextual Interpretation—This logo depicts the concern of the Lagos state government to the healthcare of her residents. The Lagos state logo is inscribed in the agency logo to create an impression that the agency was established by the state government therefore it is controlled and monitored by the state government. The human-like figure represents the residents of Lagos in terms of men, women, adults, youths as well as children irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or geographical location in Lagos. The agency is committed to taking care of Lagos residents. The orange circular framer of the logo suggests the enthusiasm and optimism of the agency. The yellow colour in this datum suggests positivity and passion exerted in performing their medical duties. The lemon colour here suggests the evergreen services rendered by the agency.

Datum 5



PAEDIATRIC ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA

Theme—The theme of this logo is childcare

Symbols—woman, baby, farm and basket

Contextual Interpretation—The logo clearly shows that professionals who operate under this association are basically concerned with the health status, well-being and welfare of children. From this logo, the woman is the channel through which a child is birthed. The baby at the back of the mother shows the traditional way Nigerian women carry their children before the advent of carriers. This method of carrying a child engenders warmth, cordiality and a level of security for the child. Therefore, professionals operating under this body are devoted to care, treatment, and well-being of Nigerian children. The basket on the woman's head suggests hardwork for provision. Usually, the Nigerian culture believes mothers must make food available to the child. The choice of green colour by the image-maker suggests freshness, rebirth and fertility. This colour equally suggests that the association is Nigerian-based.

Datum 6**NIGERIAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

Theme—The theme of this logo is healthcare

Symbols—Snake, rod (Asclepius rod) and V

Colours—Green, white and red

Contextual Interpretation—Here, this medical professional body that is responsible for animal healthcare. The snake is an animal that suggests the representation of other animals in this logo. Just as we have in datum 2, the snake here connotes the healing potential in its venom. Whenever the venom is extracted and added to other chemical substances, it becomes medicinal, healthier and prescriptible for certain illnesses, ailments or diseases. Kanodi et al (2019: 17) reveal that “the symbol depicting a single snake-entwined staff is called the Rod of Asclepius. Asclepius was a Greek man who lived in the sixth century BC and he was considered a hero-physician who performed miraculous acts of healing on the battle field...”

Datum 7**ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN YOUNG HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS**

Theme- The theme of this logo is healthcare

Symbols-- Books, laptop, Eagle, Wings, rod entwined snake

Colours—Yellow, white, Red and black

Contextual Interpretation— The first notable symbol on this logo is the book on the left side. Naturally, a book symbolizes literacy, documentation, civilization or education. It is an instrument for the literacy skills of reading and writing. For this profession, a book is a symbol of knowledge. It is also a pre-requisite for record keeping. The laptop on the right side symbolizes advanced literacy in terms of computer literacy and knowledge of advanced health information records. The image of the computer shows the upgrade or transition from the traditional system of pen and paper to a computerized system of health information records.

As presented in datum 2 and 7, similarly this logo equally reflects the Nigerian medical symbol of a snake entwined on a rod. This symbolizes that the operation, activities and duties of this association is purely medical. In addition, the eagle inscribed on the rock is equally significant. The face of the eagle especially the eye in this logo creates a sense monitoring against misconduct from any member of this profession. The eagle eye is two-sided as it hovers round the health information activities of young health information managers. The eagle here connotes strength, beauty, commitment and keen surveillance of the professional body. The wings of the eagle suggest the administrative power of the association. In this datum, the imge-maker makes yellow colour

predominant on this logo which suggest the intellectual power, optimism and enthusiasm of this association.

Datum 8



ASSOCIATION OF DENTAL TECHNOLOGIST OF NIGERIA

Theme- The theme of this logo is oral healthcare

Symbol- Book, Denture, Entwined snake, Rod, Wings

Colours—Green, white, wine and gold

Contextual Interpretation—This logo equally uses a book to suggest knowledge, documentation, literacy in terms of reading and writing. A critical look at the logo shows that the book is the basics or the theoretical backcloth of the profession. The entwined snake is a generally acknowledged medical symbol which further indicates the profession of dental technology is within the purview of healthcare or a medical field. The snake here reflects the healing power and curability potential of its venom. The denture is a key tool that is vital to the profession of a dental technologist as professionals in this association are concerned with replacement of missing tooth and restoration of oral health.

Datum 9



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RESIDENT DOCTORS

Theme—The theme of this logo is medical practice.

Symbol— Entwined snake and rod

Colours—Black, white and orange

Contextual Interpretation—The logo clearly presents the fact that this association or profession is solely for medical practitioners specifically for Nigerian resident doctors. The entwined snake around the Asclepius rod is notable and connotatively significant. These symbols keep reoccurring in various medical-related logos. As presented in data 2, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10, the entwined snake on the rod is the popularized medical symbol.

According to World Health Organisation (1948) “The staff with the snake has long been a symbol of medicine and the medical profession. It originates from Asclepius who was revered by the ancient Greeks as the god of healing. This is further reflected in the fact that the venomous substances extracted from snakes can be used when added to other chemical substances for the purpose of healing.” Therefore, the association is affiliated with medicine as doctors are seen as the medical practitioners. The orange coloured inscription suggests enthusiasm and commitment of the association.

Datum 10**HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT AND MEDICAL DEVICES DEALERS ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA**

Theme- The theme of this logo is hospital management

Symbols—Stethoscope, Syringe, carrier, wings

Colours—Green, white and black

Contextual Interpretation- The logo above is a representation of a vital professional body responsible for the supply, monitoring and regulation of hospital equipment in Nigeria. The stethoscope presented in a snake-like structure entwined on a syringe-like rod is an instrument used to monitor and examine heartbeats by doctors or nurses. The syringe hanging like a rod is another vital equipment used to inject medicinal fluids into the body of patients. The wings depict the administrative power or strength of the professional body. The carrier portrays the stretcher used in mobilizing patients whose conditions are too critical to take a walk. Therefore, these items connote the mandate of this association to making sure that every standard hospital has some hospital equipment to enhance healthcare, efficiency and effectiveness. The wings in the logo symbolise the bureaucratic strength and keen surveillance on every Nigerian-based hospital. The greenness presents the durability, freshness and commitment of the association in fulfilling their mandate.

Datum 11**COMMUNITY HEALTH PRACTITIONERS**

Theme—The theme of this professional body is health care

Symbols—Snake, a key-like rod with t-like Rod, coat of arms and a book

Colours—Green, white and red

Contextual Interpretation—The entwined snake on this rod establishes the fact that the body is a medical professional body and it is committed to overseeing the healthcare of member of the Nigerian community. The healing potential of a snake's venom to cure certain ailments and diseases is not underrated as presented in data 2, 6,7,8,9 and 10. Similarly, the book equally represents the knowledge acquired from reading and writing as presented in datum 9 and 10.

It further reinforces the power of education, literacy and documentation in form of registration to get a license of operation. It is a symbol that reflects the fact that license can only be given to professionals who have completed the community health study. The coat of arm portrays the fact the board is committed to Nigerians alone devoid of ethnicity, religion or status. The key-like rod here suggests the superiority of this board. The white background depict the transparency and purity of the board. The green colour portrays the national affiliation of the board to Nigeria.

Datum 12**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTITIONERS OF NIGERIA**

Theme—The theme of this logo is public healthcare

Symbols—Snake, Rod, Wings and Map

Colours—Green, white and silver

Contextual Interpretation—As presented in datum 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and this professional body equally make use of the medical symbol. The entwined snake on the rod represents medicine. It fully reflects that the profession is closely affiliated to Nigerian health care. The two wings on the rod show that the association is an administrative body that maintains keen surveillance on practitioners operating within the association. The Nigerian map shows that the services of this association are open to all citizens of Nigerian devoid of ethnicity, status and religious differences.

The Nigerian map is inscribed in the logo to emphasize the value of health care on Nigerian. As presented in datum 11, the white colour here equally symbolizes the transparency and purity of this association. The green colour implies freshness, durability and national affiliation. The silver colour of the rod suggests innovation, clarity and wealth of knowledge as well as the sophistication balance of the association.

Summary of the Findings

This paper has attempted to examine the selected logos of Nigerian medical professional bodies using Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) theory of Visual Grammar. The analysis of the selected logos clearly revealed the occurrence of certain components to foreground the message being communicated to the general public about healthcare. For instance, the reoccurrence of the entwined snake on a rod is a prominent medical symbol. This is because it is the general or global symbol that depicts medical care.

For instance, Datum 2, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11, all make use of the entwined snake on a rod. Kanod et al (2019) reveal that "the symbol depicting a single snake-entwined on staff is called the Rod of Asclepius. The wings of the Eagle show that the professional bodies are committed to keen surveillance, proper administration and elevation" (p. 17). It further shows the supremacy and elevation of the bodies over practitioners operating under the association as presented in Data 5, 9, 10, and 11. In addition, another semiotic resource is the use of the Nigerian map as presented in Datum 5 and Datum 7. The inscription of the Nigerian map reinforces the fact that the selected logos are Nigerian based and their services are extended to residents of Lagos without any favoritism arising from ethnicity, class, religion, gender, age and many others.

Therefore, the interpretation is based on the Nigerian outlook. The book presented in data 9, 10 and 11 shows the role education in terms of teaching and learning. The book shows that sound education, knowledge, literacy, information is central to medical healthcare development. The book used by some of these medical professional agencies to help foreground and propagate their mandates or commitments.

The usage of certain Nigerian symbols like map and coat of arms in data 1, 4 and 11 depicts that no matter the region of these medical professional bodies, there is a uniform module of operation as the commitment is basically healthcare. The inscriptions of these national symbols equally represent that these association, councils or professional bodies are fully operational and established in Nigeria.

In addition, the image of a baby in datum 4 and 5 reveal that childcare and infant care are delicate or important aspects of medicine. The use of a baby and a child reflects the several stages and the priorities given to children.

Conclusion

The paper examined the selected logos of medical professional bodies operating within Nigeria using the Van and Kress (2006) approach of Visual Grammar. The semiotic resources identified in the selected medical logos serve as instruments of healthcare propagation. From the analysis, one can conclude that medical agencies use images and symbols like the snake, Asclepius rod, child, book, wings, woman, eagle, syringe, stethoscope, laptop and greento associate with healthcare.

Onipede (2018) submits that "... the interpretation of images is by its very nature subjective, and an image can carry multiple messages dependent on on the nature of visually interpreting culture (p. 25)." Therefore, logos are highly impressionistic as they can have multiple symbols and interpretations depending on the nature of presentation and the background of the reader.

Recommendation

Based on this study's findings, it is evident that semiotic signs and symbols transcend language as it addresses a wider scope of audience despite their linguistic background and diversities. For instance, the symbol of a cigarette with the prohibition symbol has a unique interpretation of "no smoking" regardless of an individual's linguistic background but when the instruction is written in English letters "NO SMOKING", only literates as well as users of English have a knowledge of what is being written.

It is therefore recommended that the use of logos be encouraged as it enhances a clearer and wider understanding of certain concepts among speakers with diverse linguistic backgrounds. The study also recommends that the presentation of medical logos would serve as a constant reminder and help maintain checks and balance.

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