

A MULTIMODAL THEMATIZATION OF ‘KFC x HISMILE: KENTUCKY FRIED CHICKEN TOOTHPASTE’ ON INSTAGRAM POSTS

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ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengorganisasian dan kombinasi elemen visual serta linguistik dalam iklan kolaborasi KFC x Hismile di Instagram. Dengan menggunakan Potensi Struktur Generik Cheong untuk menganalisis organisasi struktural, Tata Bahasa Visual Kress dan van Leeuwen untuk menganalisis makna komposisional, serta Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik (SFL) untuk menganalisis makna tekstual melalui pendekatan Tema-Rema dan perkembangan tematik, penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif untuk mengkaji lima unggahan Instagram dari kampanye *KFC x Hismile Kentucky Fried Chicken Toothpaste* yang diterbitkan pada 1 dan 4 April 2025. Hasil pembahasan menunjukkan bahwa makna tematisasi dalam iklan tersebut dibangun melalui komposisi sistematis antara efek visual, simbolisme merek, pengumuman promosi, dan komponen linguistik yang mendukung pesan utama. Interplay antara komposisi visual dan organisasi tematik pada pola keterangan (*caption*) berkontribusi dalam membentuk citra merek kolaboratif yang selaras. Makna tematisasi merupakan hasil interaksi terpadu antara makna komposisional dan makna tekstual dalam teks multimodal digital.

Kata kunci: KFC x Hismile; tematisasi multimodal; potensi struktur generik; makna komposisional; makna tekstual

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ABSTRACT. *This study aims to analyze the visual and linguistic arrangement and combination in the KFC x Hismile collaboration advertisement on Instagram. Using Cheong's Generic Structure Potential (GSP) to analyze structural organization, Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar to analyze compositional meaning, and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze textual meaning through Theme-Rheme and thematic progression, this study employs a qualitative case study design to examine five Instagram posts from the KFC x Hismile Kentucky Fried Chicken Toothpaste campaign published on April 1st and 4th, 2025. The findings show that thematization meaning is constructed in the advertisement through the systematic composition of visual effects, brand symbolism, promotional announcements, and linguistic components that support the central message. The interplay between visual composition and the thematic organization of caption patterns contributes to forming a coherent, collaborative brand image. Thematization meaning is the result of the integrated interaction between compositional meaning and textual meaning within digital multimodal texts.*

Keywords: *KFC x Hismile; multimodal thematization; Generic Structure Potential; compositional meaning; textual meaning*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed the landscape of modern communication, with Instagram emerging as a dominant platform for both personal expression and commercial promotion. Advertising on Instagram no longer relies solely on language; it operates through a complex interplay of visual and linguistic resources that work together to construct meaning. In this environment, cross-industry brand collaborations have emerged as a significant cultural and marketing phenomenon, merging distinct brand identities into unified promotional campaigns. One striking example

is the collaboration between Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and the Australian oral-care brand Hismile, which released a limited-edition Kentucky Fried Chicken Toothpaste on April Fools' Day, 2025. This unconventional partnership, pairing a globally recognized fast-food brand with a dental care company, generated considerable public attention through its Instagram campaign, raising important questions about how multimodal meaning is constructed in digital advertising that deliberately crosses industry boundaries.

The central issue motivating this study is that the thematic message of advertisements on Instagram

cannot be fully understood through a single-mode linguistic analysis. In the KFC x Hismile campaign, meaning is distributed across visual structures, brand symbolism, layout composition, and interactive captions. This creates a multimodal thematization problem: the promotional intent of the advertisement is only partially recoverable without a framework capable of integrating both visual and linguistic dimensions. Thematization, defined as the strategic arrangement of communicative elements to foreground specific meanings and guide audience interpretation (Martínez Lirola, 2012), is therefore best understood not as a product of language alone, but as the result of the interplay between semiotic modes. Tasić and Stamenković (2015) describe this interplay as a dynamic connection between words and images, in which modes may be dominant, supportive, or complementary in constructing meanings that cannot be adequately conveyed through one mode alone.

To address this, the present study integrates three theoretical frameworks. Cheong's (2004) Generic Structure Potential (GSP) is applied to analyze the structural organization of the advertisements, identifying both obligatory and optional visual and linguistic elements — including the Lead, Display, Emblem, Announcement, Enhancer, Tag, and Call-and-Visit Information. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar is employed to analyze compositional meaning, examining how salience, information value, and framing direct viewer interpretation across the advertisement images. Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), extended into Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) by O'Halloran (2008), provides the analytical basis for examining textual meaning through the Theme-Rheme structure and patterns of thematic progression in the captions. Together, these frameworks allow the study to examine how visual composition and linguistic thematization interact to construct an integrated meaning in advertising. Guided by these frameworks, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How are the visual and linguistic structural elements organized in the KFC x Hismile Toothpaste advertisement images? (2) How are compositional and textual meanings constructed in the KFC x Hismile advertisement posts? (3) How does the interplay of visual elements, linguistic units, and captions create integrated themes in the KFC x Hismile advertisement posts?

The scope of this study is delimited to five Instagram posts from the KFC x Hismile Kentucky Fried Chicken Toothpaste campaign, published on April 1st and 4th, 2025, from the collaborative

accounts @kfc and @hismile. The analysis focuses on static visual and linguistic modes, including image composition, on-image text, and post captions, and does not extend to audio, motion, or user-generated comments. This focus allows for a concentrated and methodologically coherent examination of multimodal thematization within a single, well-defined campaign.

Several previous studies have examined multimodal discourse in advertising on Instagram and related platforms. Khoirunnisaa (2023) analyzed Indonesian beauty product advertisements featuring Korean celebrities, applying GSP, the Transitivity System, and Visual Grammar. While her findings demonstrated effective brand engagement through the interplay of visual and linguistic elements, the study was limited to conventional beauty advertising within the Korean Wave context and did not examine a single campaign in depth across one data source. Ernanda (2023) conducted a multimodal discourse analysis of the McDonald's X BTS "BTS Meal" campaign, revealing how celebrity imagery, color symbolism, and compositional centrality created powerful audience impressions. However, that study excluded post captions from its analysis and did not address thematic progression or cross-industry meaning-making. Dania and Sari (2023) examined a KFC Indonesia video advertisement using a four-system multimodal approach but did not apply GSP or SFL, and their focus on a single-brand, single-country video advertisement left unaddressed the semiotic challenges of cross-industry collaboration. The present study responds directly to these gaps: it examines a cross-industry collaboration between brands with semantically opposing identities, applies an integrated framework combining GSP, Visual Grammar, and SFL to both visual and caption data, and focuses in depth on a single defined campaign.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on multimodal discourse analysis in digital advertising by demonstrating that thematization meaning in Instagram advertisements is the product of the integrated interaction between compositional and textual meaning, rather than the work of any single semiotic mode. For scholars in linguistics, communication, and media studies, the study offers a replicable analytical model for examining how cross-industry brand collaborations construct coherent promotional themes in social media environments. For practitioners — advertisers, digital content creators, and brand strategists — the findings provide concrete evidence of how structural composition, visual salience, and linguistic thematic organization can be strategically combined to build brand image and

audience engagement in unconventional collaborative campaigns.

METHOD

This section describes the method and techniques used in the study, including the techniques of data collection and data analysis. This section should also describe the source(s) of the data. This section should illustrate the steps taken during the study that are logical, systematic, and make use of scientific approach(es). Theories applied in the study can also be discussed in this section, showing how they are relevant in solving issues or problems posed in the study objectives.

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine how visual and linguistic elements are organized and integrated to construct multimodal meaning in the KFC x Hismile Kentucky Fried Chicken Toothpaste Instagram advertisement campaign. A qualitative approach is adopted because the research questions concern meaning-making processes, semiotic interaction, and socio-cultural context — phenomena that require interpretive, in-depth analysis rather than quantitative measurement (Creswell, 2014). The case study design is appropriate because the object of investigation is a bounded system: a single, well-defined Instagram advertising campaign with specific boundaries of platform (Instagram), brand object (KFC x Hismile advertisements), time period (April 1st–4th, 2025), and communicative activity (digital promotional discourse). Creswell (2014) affirms that case study methodology is especially suited to research that aims to develop a contextually rich and holistic understanding of a complex phenomenon within its real-life setting.

The data in this study consist of two principal types: visual data and linguistic data. The visual data comprise five Instagram advertisement images from the KFC x Hismile collaboration campaign, while the linguistic data consist of words, phrases, and clauses appearing both within the images and in the post captions. The data source is the official Instagram accounts @kfc and @hismile, accessed in December 2025. Posts 1 through 4 were uploaded on April 1st, 2025, and Post 5 on April 4th, 2025. Posts were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) the post is classified as collaborative content between @kfc and @hismile, (2) the post contains both visual images and captions as multimodal units of analysis, and (3) the post was published within the April 1st–4th, 2025 campaign period. These criteria ensure that only data which are

analytically rich, contextually coherent, and directly relevant to the study's multimodal focus are included. Data were collected through document analysis, a method Creswell (2014) describes as the systematic study and interpretation of written, visual, and digital materials to build empirical knowledge. Since all five posts are publicly available promotional materials that cannot be altered after publication, they satisfy the requirements of stable, non-reactive, and accessible qualitative data. The data collection procedure followed the framework of Creswell and Poth (2018), beginning with the identification of the Instagram platform as the research site and the official brand accounts as the data location. Data were gathered through systematic documentation — screenshots of all selected posts, including both the visual components and the full captions. Following collection, each post was transcribed, annotated, and organized according to its analytical elements to ensure transparency, traceability, and methodological consistency throughout the analysis.

The study integrates three interrelated analytical frameworks that operate at different but complementary levels of multimodal meaning. The first is Cheong's (2004) Generic Structure Potential (GSP), which is used to address the first research question by mapping the structural organization of each advertisement into its obligatory and optional components. Visual elements are classified as Lead such as subdivided into Locus of Attention (LoA) and Complementary Locus of Attention (Comp.LoA), Display, and Emblem, while linguistic elements are classified as Announcement, Enhancer, Tag, and Call-and-Visit Information. The second framework is Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, applied to address the second research question through analysis of compositional meaning across three dimensions: Information Value (Left-Right Given-New, Upper-Lower Ideal-Real, and Center-Margin), Saliency (size, color contrast, and focus), and Framing (visual boundaries, spatial separation, and layout continuity). The third framework is Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), extended through O'Halloran's (2008) Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA), which is applied to the captions to analyze textual meaning through Theme-Rheme structure and patterns of thematic progression such as constant, linear, and derived. Finally, the analysis combines to see how the interplay of visual and linguistic constructs meaning using McCloud (1993), which can be classified into seven relationships such as word-specific, picture-specific, duo-specific, additive, parallel, montage, and interdependent, reflecting varying degrees of dependency between modes and highlighting that communication in modern digital advertising relies on

the dynamic interplay of visual and linguistic resources.

Data analysis follows the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three simultaneous and cyclical stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data condensation stage, all visual and linguistic elements from the five posts are selected, classified, and reduced into analytically meaningful units according to the three frameworks. In the data display stage, condensed data are organized into structured formats, annotated images with color-coded GSP labels, compositional layout diagrams with directional lines indicating information value and framing, and Theme-Rheme analysis tables, to make structural patterns, thematic configurations, and cross-post relationships clearly observable. In the final stage, conclusions are drawn and verified by revisiting the condensed data and displays, interpreting the significance of structural configurations, multimodal interactions, and thematic patterns in relation to the three research questions. This cyclical process ensures that interpretations remain grounded in the data and that analytical rigor is maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the multimodal thematization of the 'KFC x Hismile: Kentucky Fried Chicken Toothpaste' advertisements on Instagram posts. The study focuses on five official Instagram posts uploaded collaboratively by the @kfc and @hismile accounts in April 2025 as part of an April Fool's Day celebration. The data analyzed consist of two main elements: visual and linguistic. The visual data includes images of the product and layout within each post, while the linguistic data includes written text embedded in the images and captions accompanying each post.

The chapter is structured into several analytical sections. First, the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) analysis identifies the visual and linguistic elements that form the structure of the advertisements. Second, the Visual Grammar analysis explores compositional meanings—including Left-Right (Given-New), Upper-Lower (Ideal-Real), and Center-Margin—as proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). Third, the textual meaning of the linguistic elements is examined using the Theme-Rheme analysis drawn from Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994). Lastly, the chapter examines the interplay between visual details, linguistic units, and captions, showing how integrated

themes are formed through multimodal thematization across the campaign.

The results demonstrate that the advertisements adhere to and strategically adapt the Generic Structure Potential of advertising discourse, particularly through the flexible application of optional elements such as Tag, Emblem, and Call-and-Visit Information to suit the affordances of Instagram as a digital platform. Compositional meaning is constructed through consistent product positioning, dominant KFC color identity, branding hierarchy, and framing strategies that stabilize the collaboration and introduce novelty. At the textual level, captions are primarily organized around experiential or topical Themes with continuous thematic development, forming logical, convincing, and audience-directed promotional language. Additionally, the findings indicate that thematic meaning is not generated by a single mode alone, but through multimodal combination—visual, linguistic, emojis, hashtags, and carousel sequencing interact dynamically to direct audience interpretation.

4.1) Visual and Linguistic Elements of Images from Five 'KFC x Hismile' Posts

This section presents the analysis of visual and linguistic structural elements identified in the five advertisement images of the KFC x Hismile campaign based on the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) framework by Cheong (2004). The analysis focuses on the structural organization within the advertisement pictures and examines how the Lead, Display, Emblem, Announcement, Enhancer, Tag, and Call-and-Visit Information are graphically and linguistically organized across Posts 1–5. These components are identified in each post by determining their presence or absence and placement, in order to establish the recurrent generic pattern in the advertisements.

The Lead, as the most visually salient element, consistently foregrounds the collaborative products such as the KFC x Hismile toothpaste, electric toothbrush, and product packaging, positioned centrally in each post to attract immediate viewer attention. In Posts 1 through 4, the Locus of Attention (LoA) is realized through the oral-care product set, while KFC food items such as fried chicken, french fries, biscuits, and sauce cups serve as the Complementary Locus of Attention (Comp.LoA). These food items reinforce the 'fried chicken flavor' concept and strengthen the humorous contrast between food and oral-care products. In Post 5, however, the Comp.LoA shifts away from food imagery; the textual overlay 'GIVEAWAY' and 'WE AREN'T FOOLING... IT'S REAL' functions as the LoA,

reflecting a shift in the communicative purpose from product introduction to promotional engagement.

The Display element is consistently realized across all five posts through the full visual presentation of the collaborative product set, including the toothpaste tube, electric toothbrush, and product packaging. This element serves to demonstrate the collaboration by presenting the products as real consumer items rather than mere novelties. Notably, the Display varies across Posts 1 to 4 in terms of scope, such as Posts 1 and 4 feature the full product bundle, while Posts 2 and 3 isolate individual items, suggesting a deliberate micro-level sequencing strategy: introduce the bundle, isolate components, and reintroduce them. This pattern reflects what Halliday and Hasan (2014) describe as genre staging, in which structural phases are developed to build coherence and persuasive emphasis.

The Emblem is realized through the KFC logo, the KFC and Hismile brand names printed on all product items, and the consistent use of red and white colors associated with KFC's visual identity. The presence of both brand emblems confirms the collaboration and reinforces brand authenticity. Notably, the Hismile emblem is absent in Post 2, indicating selective brand salience, a finding consistent with the co-branding strategy identified by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), wherein visual composition controls viewer attention through salience and framing.

At the linguistic level, the Announcement is consistently fulfilled by the product labels printed on the toothpaste bottle and packaging, specifically 'fried chicken flavored toothpaste' and 'electric toothbrush.' These phrases serve as the primary message of the advertisements, directly introducing the product and foregrounding its most distinctive feature. The Enhancer supplements this Announcement through functional and technical details such as 'fluoride free, balancing novelty with a sense of product legitimacy and credibility. The Tag element appears only in Posts 2, 3, 4, and 5 through the familiar KFC phrases 'It's Finger Lickin' Good,' '11 herbs and spices,' 'Secret Recipe,' 'Kentucky Fried Chicken,' and 'Col. Harland Sanders,' all of which reinforce brand recognition rather than introducing new product information. Post 1 lacks a Tag, a strategic omission that allows the novelty of the product concept and visual branding to take precedence in the opening post of the campaign.

Call-and-Visit Information, such as website links, QR codes, or social media handles, is absent from the visual images across all five posts. This absence aligns with the structural affordances of Instagram, where navigational and interactive features are embedded within the platform itself, such as

clickable profiles, tagged accounts, and embedded links, making this element structurally redundant in the visual image. The absence does not challenge Cheong's (2004) framework but rather demonstrates the flexibility of GSP to adapt to digital media contexts.

The results indicate that the five posts follow the GSP format while adapting to the digital affordances of Instagram. The obligatory elements, Lead and Display, always fulfill their roles in introducing and highlighting the collaborative products, while optional elements are selectively employed to modify communicative attention and brand salience. The structural variation across Posts 1–4 suggests a staged product promotion strategy, while Post 5 demonstrates a genre shift from product display advertising to promotional-event advertising, reconfiguring the Announcement and visual emphasis toward participatory engagement.

4.2) Compositional and Textual Meaning Construction of the 'KFC x Hismile' Advertisement Posts

4.2.1.) Compositional Meaning of Five Posts

The compositional analysis of the KFC x Hismile posts is grounded in the Visual Grammar framework of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), which examines how visual elements are spatially arranged to construct meaning through three key dimensions: information value, salience, and framing. Information value is determined by the hierarchical positioning of elements along left-right, upper-lower, and center-margin axes, which assigns relative importance and guides the viewer's line of sight. Salience refers to the degree of visual attentiveness created by size, color contrast, sharpness, and focus, ensuring that certain elements are perceived as most significant. Framing examines the degree of connectedness or separation between visual elements, revealing whether they are unified as a cohesive unit or presented as distinct informational components.

Across Posts 1 to 4, the information value of the advertisements is organized through a consistent spatial logic. In the horizontal (Given-New) axis, KFC food items and familiar brand imagery are positioned on the left as the Given, representing already-known or visually accessible contextual support, while the collaborative product packaging and the toothbrush are placed on the right as the New, foregrounding product novelty and directing viewers toward the innovative concept of fried chicken-flavored toothpaste. This horizontal distribution constructs a meaning pathway that transitions from brand familiarity to product innovation, allowing the audience to process the unconventional collaboration

in a gradual and persuasive manner. In the vertical (Ideal-Real) axis, the upper section consistently represents conceptual, symbolic, and aspirational values—such as brand identity and abstract promotional framing—while the lower section presents tangible, material information including physical products and food items. This vertical organization effectively links conceptual branding with material reality across the five posts. The collaborative product is consistently placed at the center of each composition, indicating its role as the nucleus of the visual message, while food elements and brand elements occupy the margins as supporting contextual cues.

In terms of salience, all five posts employ a dominant red and white color scheme closely aligned with KFC's visual identity, ensuring immediate brand recognition and emotional intensity. The collaborative products are rendered in sharp focus and at comparatively large sizes, making them visually dominant. The food imagery—fried chicken, french fries, sauce—enhances sensory appeal through textural detail and warm tonal contrast, creating a dual salience strategy that simultaneously foregrounds the product and reinforces the food-flavor theme. Post 5 diverges from this pattern: rather than food imagery, bold typographic overlays ('GIVEAWAY' and 'WE AREN'T FOOLING... IT'S REAL') realize the primary salient elements, reflecting the shift from sensory branding to promotional communication.

The framing structure across all five posts is characterized by weak framing, as visual elements are closely integrated through overlapping placement, shared color harmony, and continuous spatial cohesion. This weak framing encourages viewers to perceive each post as a unified, coherent message rather than a collection of separate informational units, normalizing the unusual product concept and reinforcing the brand integration between KFC and Hismile. The consistent use of the KFC visual identity as a semiotic stabilizer—through dominant color, logo size, and background food imagery—positions the collaboration within the cultural sphere of KFC, creating a sense of novelty framed by familiarity.

One of the most significant semiotic recontextualizations in the campaign occurs through the Tag 'It's Finger Lickin' Good.' Conventionally associated with KFC's food products, this slogan is reapplied to refer to the collaborative toothpaste and toothbrush in Posts 2, 3, and 4. This process exemplifies intersemiotic complementarity (O'Halloran, 2008), in which a linguistic meaning is reinstated within a new visual context, expanding the semantic potential of the phrase from literal taste

satisfaction to an ironic cross-domain reference that reinforces the novelty and humor of the collaboration.

4.2.2) Textual Meaning of Five Posts

The textual meaning analysis examines how the linguistic elements embedded in the post images and captions construct meaning through the Theme-Rheme structure and thematic progression patterns, as developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics by Halliday (1994) and further applied to multimodal discourse by Eggins (2004).

Within the advertisement images, the Announcement element consistently functions as the experiential or topical Theme, establishing the point of departure for the promotional message. In Posts 1 and 2, the nominal group 'fried chicken flavored toothpaste' serves as the unmarked topical Theme, foregrounding the product identity and the novelty of the collaboration, while 'fluoride free' functions as the Rheme, providing supplementary functional information. This Theme-Rheme structure can be reconstructed as the clause 'Fried chicken flavored toothpaste is fluoride free,' where the thematic selection of the product name ensures that innovation and brand cooperation remain the primary focus, and product safety serves as elaborative information. This thematic organization aligns with advertising discourse conventions (Halliday, 2014), in which product identification precedes functional evaluation to allow audiences to first recognize and then process the product's attributes. In Post 3, the Announcement 'electric toothbrush' functions as the topical Theme, identifying the product category and establishing the informational focus of the image. Posts 4 and 5 extend this pattern through the inclusion of multiple Tag phrases, with KFC's heritage slogans and product descriptions functioning as additional Rhematic elements that reinforce brand identity beyond the primary promotional message.

At the caption level, Posts 1–4 share a single unified caption, reflecting a deliberate discursive strategy of brand consistency across the carousel format. The caption 'Not a prank. It's here. And it's Finger Lickin' Good. @hismile x KFC is available now, while supplies last. Only at <https://us.hismileteeth.com/pages/kfc>' is organized through a series of elliptical and full clauses, all structured around a Constant Theme Pattern. The implicit topical Theme 'It' recurs throughout, referring anaphorically to the collaborative product and maintaining discourse coherence across clauses. This constant progression, as described by Eggins (2004), reinforces topic continuity and stabilizes brand identity between clauses. The textual theme 'And' in the third clause functions as a connecting element that links the interpersonal assertion of authenticity ('Not a

prank') to the sensory appeal of the KFC slogan ('It's Finger Lickin' Good'), demonstrating how textual and interpersonal meaning interact within the caption's discursive structure.

Post 5 presents a distinct textual organization reflecting its participatory promotional function. The caption opens with 'Giveaway Closed' as the unmarked topical Theme, establishing the campaign event as the primary point of departure. The subsequent interrogative clause 'Want to WIN the now SOLD OUT... Combo?' shifts the thematic focus from the institutional entity to the addressee 'you,' initiating an interpersonal engagement. This is followed by a linear thematic progression from 'Here's how' to a series of imperative clauses, 'Tag your friends,' 'Like this post,' 'And make sure you're following @kfc and @hismile', in which the implicit Theme 'you' is maintained throughout, constructing a Constant Theme Pattern centered on the audience as the active participant. Several clauses exhibit a Derived Theme Pattern, in which the Theme is drawn from the overarching campaign framework (e.g., 'Every comment is one entry,' 'Competition begins at the time of posting') rather than restating the prior participant-oriented theme, adding institutional procedural information without disrupting thematic coherence. The strategic use of a marked topical Theme in 'Bonus Entry: Share this post to your story' foregrounds the incentive before the action, emphasizing reward and increasing the persuasiveness of the participation instruction.

Across both image-level and caption-level textual analysis, the dominance of experiential or topical Themes reflects the advertising practice of organizing messages around concrete participants, promotional actions, and audience address. Elliptical structures and imperative forms, such as 'Not a prank' and 'Tag your friends', create immediacy, reduce syntactic complexity, and simulate direct speech acts, increasing audience involvement and the commanding power of the promotional message. The consistent tagging of @kfc and @hismile and the use of hashtags such as #KFCxHismile function as algorithm markers within the digital platform, extending thematic meaning beyond the individual post and into the broader social media discourse network.

4.3) Interplay of Visual Elements, Linguistic Units, and Captions Creating Integrated Themes

This section examines the interplay between visual and linguistic modes across the five KFC x Hismile posts, analyzing how semiotic resources interact dynamically to construct integrated thematic meanings. The analysis draws on Scott McCloud's (1993) taxonomy of visual-linguistic relationships,

categorizing the interplay in each post as interdependent, additive, picture-specific, or duo-specific. Additionally, the carousel format of Posts 1–4 is examined as a sequential meaning-making structure, in which interpretation is built up across slides rather than communicated immediately and directly, as in the single-image format of Post 5.

Post 1 is classified as interdependent, as meaning can only be fully constructed through the mutual interaction of the visual and linguistic modes. On first encounter, the visual composition, featuring the product set at the center, surrounded by KFC food items, creates a semantic ambiguity derived from the juxtaposition of incompatible domains: the world of fast food and the world of oral hygiene. The Announcement 'Fried Chicken Flavored Toothpaste' printed on the product functions as the thematic anchor of the image, yet the unusual combination of elements does not immediately resolve into a clear promotional message. The caption's Theme-Rheme structure—'(It's) Not a prank... @hismile x KFC is available now'—directly addresses viewer skepticism and confirms the authenticity of the collaboration, providing the linguistic resolution necessary to stabilize interpretation. A removal test confirms this interdependence: the image alone remains ambiguous, while the caption alone lacks specific referential grounding. Neither mode independently conveys the intended meaning; together, they construct a coherent promotional message.

Post 2 is classified as additive, as the visual mode carries the primary informational message while the linguistic mode supplements and reinforces it. By Post 2, the product concept has been visually established, and the closer framing of the toothpaste alongside the KFC food items reduces the semantic tension present in Post 1. The Announcement 'fried chicken flavored toothpaste' is now more readable and functionally explicit, with the visual composition confirming the product identity without requiring linguistic clarification. The caption, identical to Post 1, no longer serves a disambiguating function; instead, it contributes interpersonal meaning and tonal reinforcement, particularly through the Tag recontextualization 'It's Finger Lickin' Good,' which shifts from affirming authenticity to affirming sensory appeal. The visual mode is the primary meaning-making resource in this post, with the linguistic mode providing additive rather than essential support.

Post 3 is classified as picture-specific, as the visual component dominates and the linguistic element plays a secondary, supportive role. In this post, the electric toothbrush is placed in a lifestyle-based environment alongside KFC food products, shifting the framing from conceptual novelty to everyday usability. The visual composition no longer

requires linguistic clarification, as the setting itself communicates the product's normalized consumption context. The caption, unchanged from the previous posts, no longer introduces or resolves ambiguity; rather, it functions as an interpersonal consistency device that maintains the campaign's tone and brand voice. The image alone is sufficient to convey the product concept and its contextual application, while the caption without the visual lacks contextual specificity.

Post 4 is classified as duo-specific, as both the visual and linguistic modes independently convey the same message in a parallel and mutually reinforcing manner. The visual composition is clear and direct, presenting the full product lineup with high salience on brand logos and product packaging, and reducing the contextual food imagery that created ambiguity in earlier posts. The Announcement is graphically integrated and immediately legible, requiring no supplementary explanation. The caption, consistent with previous posts, mirrors the visual message by reiterating the authenticity and availability of the product. In this post, neither mode depends on the other to complete its meaning; both modes simultaneously deliver the same ideational content, confirming each other rather than relying on each other for interpretation.

Post 5 is classified as additive, but operates differently from Post 2. As a single-image format, visual and linguistic elements are presented simultaneously, creating a more immediate and stable meaning-making process. The image foregrounds the giveaway through bold typographic overlays ('GIVEAWAY' and 'WE AREN'T FOOLING... IT'S REAL') functioning as both Lead (LoA) and Primary Announcement within the GSP framework. The visual mode is sufficient to convey the promotional theme, but the caption adds essential procedural information—participation instructions, eligibility criteria, and competition terms—that extends the communicative function of the post from awareness to action. Without the caption, the viewer understands the giveaway event but lacks the means to participate; without the image, the caption functions instructionally but lacks the visual appeal and immediacy necessary to attract engagement.

Taken as a whole, the carousel structure of Posts 1–4 realizes a linear and sequential meaning-making process in which the interplay between visual and linguistic modes evolves strategically across slides, from interdependent to additive, picture-specific, and duo-specific. The stable caption serves as a discursive anchor, providing semantic continuity across slides, while the changing visual content reconfigures the text-image relationship at each step,

guiding the audience from ambiguity through contextualization to clarity and confirmation. This sequential interpretive architecture creates interpretive gaps between slides that require active audience engagement to resolve, echoing the participatory meaning-making principle described by McCloud (1993). Notably, the absent categories in McCloud's taxonomy, word-specific, parallel, and montage, confirm that the campaign consistently maintains a high degree of integration between visual and linguistic modes, with neither mode operating entirely independently of the other.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the multimodal thematization of the KFC x Hismile Kentucky Fried Chicken Toothpaste campaign on Instagram through three analytical lenses: Generic Structure Potential by Cheong (2004), compositional by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), and textual meaning by Halliday (1994), and the interplay of visual and linguistic modes by McCloud (1993); Tasić & Stamenković (2015). Regarding the first research question, the analysis demonstrates that the visual and linguistic structural elements across all five posts conform to and strategically adapt the GSP framework. The obligatory elements, Lead and Display, are consistently present, foregrounding the collaborative product set as the primary promotional focus, while optional elements such as Tag, Enhancer, and Emblem are selectively deployed according to each post's communicative purpose. The absence of Call-and-Visit Information in the visual images reflects an adaptation to Instagram's digital affordances, where navigational features are embedded within the platform itself. The structural variation across Posts 1–4, from complete product bundle to isolated components and back, reflects a systematic genre staging strategy, while Post 5 represents a genre reconfiguration from product-display to promotional-event advertising, demonstrating the contextual flexibility of GSP elements within a single campaign.

With regard to the second research question, compositional meaning is constructed through consistent spatial organization, color dominance, branding hierarchy, and framing strategies. The collaborative product is invariably positioned at the center and along the Upper-Lower (Ideal-Real) axis, stabilizing it as both an aspirational and tangible commodity. The predominance of KFC's red and white visual identity functions as a semiotic anchor that frames the collaboration within an established brand discourse, while weak framing across all posts encourages unified interpretation of food and oral-care imagery. At the textual level, experiential and topical

Themes dominate both image-embedded texts and captions, organizing meaning around concrete participants and promotional actions. The Constant Theme Pattern prevails across the Posts 1–4 caption, with the implicit referent 'It' maintaining discourse coherence, while Post 5 employs a more varied thematic progression, linear, constant, and derived, to construct a procedural and participatory discourse structure suited to the giveaway format. Regarding the third research question, the interplay analysis reveals that Posts 1–4 strategically vary their visual-linguistic relationship across carousel slides, from interdependent to additive, picture-specific, and duo-specific, constructing a sequential meaning-making process that leads the audience from ambiguity toward clarity. Post 5 employs an additive relationship in a single-image format, delivering promotional information immediately and directly. Across all five posts, thematic meaning emerges not from any single semiotic mode but from the dynamic interaction of visual composition, linguistic structure, emojis, hashtags, and platform-specific sequencing, confirming that multimodal thematization in digital advertising is an integrated and strategically orchestrated process.

This study offers several directions for future research and practical application. From a research perspective, subsequent studies could expand the data scope to include more posts, longer campaign timelines, or cross-platform comparisons across Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X, in order to examine whether the patterns of thematic integration and brand identity reinforcement observed here are characteristic of cross-industry digital collaborations more broadly. Future research could also incorporate audience reception data, such as comment analysis and engagement metrics, to empirically validate how integrated multimodal themes are interpreted by consumers, complementing the textual and semiotic evidence provided in the present study. The analytical framework applied here, combining GSP, Visual Grammar, SFL, and interplay analysis, may also be usefully extended to other unconventional brand collaborations or viral marketing campaigns. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for advertisers and digital content creators: the strategic use of information value, salience, framing, and thematic progression can be deliberately applied to structure visual composition and caption design in ways that guide audience interpretation, reinforce brand identity, and sustain engagement across multi-post social media campaigns.

CITATIONS AND DOCUMENTATIONS

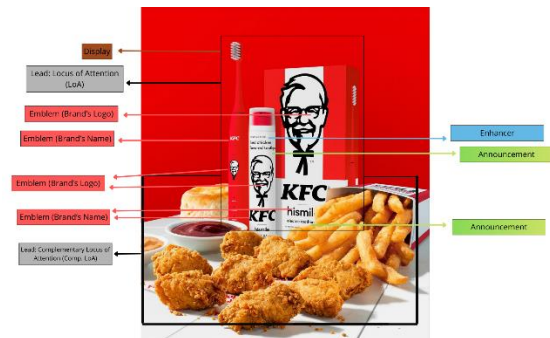


Figure 1. GSP Analysis of Post 1
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)



Figure 2. GSP Analysis of Post 2
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)

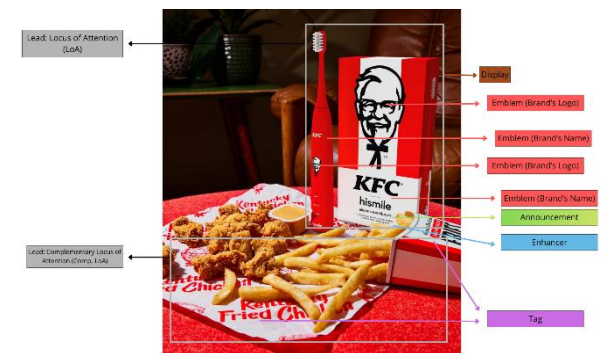


Figure 3. GSP Analysis of Post 3
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)



Figure 4. GSP Analysis of Post 4
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)



Figure 5. GSP Analysis of Post 5
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)



Figure 9. Compositional Analysis of Post 4
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)

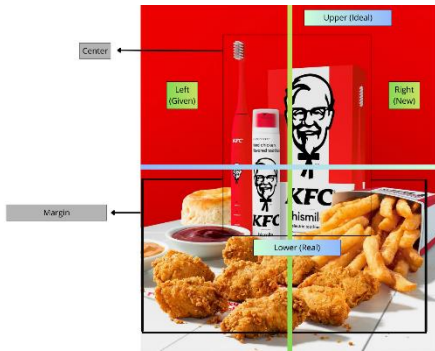


Figure 6. Compositional Analysis of Post 1
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)

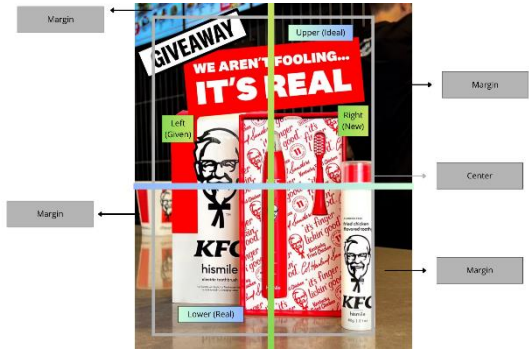


Figure 10. Compositional Analysis of Post 5
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)



Figure 7. Compositional Analysis of Post 2
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)

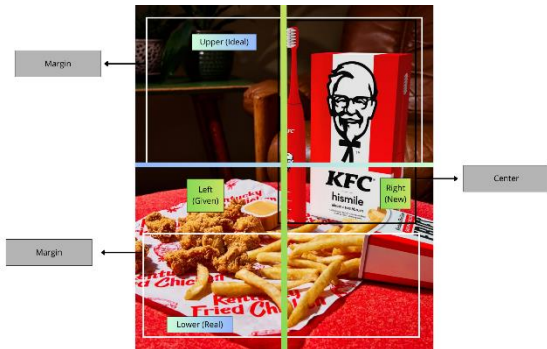


Figure 8. Compositional Analysis of Post 3
(Source: Instagram @kfc & @hismile)

Table 1. Textual Analysis Tabulation of Five Images of Posts

Experiential Theme	Rheme	Thematic Progression
Fried Chicken Flavored Toothpaste (Unmarked)	is fluoride free	-
It (Unmarked)	's Finger Lickin' Good	-
Electric toothbrush (Unmarked)	has a body and one head of the toothbrush and one USB to USB-C charging cable.	-
We (Unmarked)	aren't fooling	-
It (Unmarked)	's real	-

Table 2. Tabulation Thematic Analysis of Post 1 - 4 Caption

Theme		Rheme	Thematic Progression
Textual Theme	Experiential Theme		
	(It) (Unmarked)	's not a prank	Constant

	It (Unmarked)	's here	Constant
And (Connecting)	It (Unmarked)	's Finger Lickin' Good	Constant
	@hismile x KFC (Unmarked)	is available now, while supplies last	Constant
While (Connecting)	supplies (Unmarked)	last	Derived
	(It) (Unmarked)	is only at https://us.hismileteeth.com/pages/kfc	Constant

Table 3. Tabulation Thematic Analysis of Post 5 Caption

Theme			Rheme	Thematic Progression
Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Experiential Theme		
		Giveaway (Unmarked)	is closed	-
Do (Verbal)		(you) (Unmarked)	WIN the now SOLD OUT Finger Lickin' Good Hismile x KFC Fried Chicken Toothpaste and Electric Toothbrush Combo?	Linear
		Here (Marked)	's how	Linear
		(You) (Unmarked)	Tag your friends	Constant
		Every comment (Unmarked)	is one entry	Derived
		(You) (Unmarked)	Like this post	Constant
And (Connecting)		(you) (Unmarked)	make sure you're following @kfc and @hismile	Constant

		You (Unmarked)	're following @kfc and @hismile	Constant
		Bonus Entry: (You) (Marked + Unmarked)	Share this post to your story	Constant
		Competition (Unmarked)	begins at the time of posting, application close 6pm Sunday, 6 th April EST	Derived
		Application (Unmarked)	close at 6pm Sunday, 6th April EST.	Derived
		Winner (Unmarked)	chosen at random, the more entries, the more chances	Derived
		The more entries (Marked)	the more chances	Linear
		Competition (Unmarked)	(is) only available in the US	Derived
		(you) (Unmarked)	see website for full competition Terms & Conditions	Constant

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