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# Constructing Drug Abuse Narratives in Digital Spaces: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Selected Facebook Anti-Drug Campaign Videos

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***Abstract***
*This study examined how visual and multimodal elements construct persuasive narratives against hard drug use in five high-engagement Facebook campaign videos targeting Nigerian audiences. Drawing on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020, 2021) multimodal discourse analysis framework, the research investigated how semiotic resources—including visual composition, colour symbolism, gestural communication, sonic elements, and spatial arrangements—work together to communicate the dangers and consequences of drug abuse more effectively than text-based messages alone. The selected videos, which collectively garnered millions of views, employed diverse genres, including musical performances and dramatic skits, to reach mass audiences across digital platforms. Through systematic analysis of representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, the study revealed how multimodal affordances enabled campaign creators to construct emotionally resonant and culturally grounded narratives that transcend linguistic barriers. The findings demonstrate that the strategic deployment of visual metaphors, embodied performances, and audio-visual synchronisation creates layered meaning-making opportunities that amplify anti-drug messages within Nigeria's digital public sphere. The study contributes to understanding digital health communication strategies in African contexts and underscores the importance of multimodal literacy in contemporary social advocacy campaigns.*

***Keywords:*** multimodal discourse analysis, drug abuse narratives, Facebook campaigns, visual communication, digital advocacy, Nigeria

## I. Introduction

The proliferation of digital media platforms has fundamentally transformed how public health messages are conceived, disseminated, and consumed in contemporary Nigerian society. As internet penetration rates continue to surge across the country, social media platforms—particularly Facebook—have emerged as critical sites for health advocacy and behavioural change communication (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023). Within this evolving digital landscape, anti-drug campaigns have increasingly leveraged multimodal resources to construct compelling narratives that warn against

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the perils of substance abuse, particularly hard drugs such as tramadol, codeine, methamphetamine, and other illicit substances that have reached epidemic proportions among Nigerian youth (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA], 2023).

Nigeria faces a formidable drug abuse crisis that cuts across demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic boundaries. Recent epidemiological data indicate that approximately 14.3 million Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 64 abuse psychoactive substances, with particularly alarming rates among adolescents and young adults (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2024; Adamson et al., 2023). The devastating consequences of this epidemic—including mental health disorders, criminal involvement, family disintegration, and premature mortality—have galvanised governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations, religious institutions, and civil society groups to deploy innovative communication strategies aimed at prevention and awareness (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023). Within this context, social media-based campaigns have gained prominence as cost-effective, wide-reaching interventions capable of engaging millions of Nigerians simultaneously (Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

Traditional approaches to health communication in Nigeria have predominantly privileged text-based modes of message delivery, often overlooking the persuasive potency of visual, gestural, sonic, and spatial semiotic resources (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023). This limitation is particularly significant in a multilingual, multicultural context like Nigeria, where linguistic diversity and varying literacy levels necessitate communication strategies that transcend verbal language (Oluga & Soriwei, 2022). The emergence of multimodal discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological framework offers scholars robust analytical tools to investigate how meaning is constructed through the orchestrated deployment of multiple semiotic modes (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020, 2021; Jewitt et al., 2023).

This study examines five high-engagement Facebook anti-drug campaign videos that have collectively garnered millions of views from Nigerian audiences. These videos employ diverse generic conventions—including musical performances and dramatic skits—to communicate the dangers and consequences of hard drug use. By applying Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020, 2021) multimodal discourse analysis framework, this research investigates how visual composition, colour symbolism, gestural communication, sonic elements, and spatial arrangements function as meaning-making resources that surpass the communicative efficacy of linguistic text alone. The central research questions guiding this enquiry are: (1) How do visual and multimodal elements construct anti-drug narratives in Facebook campaign videos targeting Nigerian audiences? (2) What semiotic resources are deployed to represent the dangers and consequences of drug abuse? (3) How do these multimodal configurations enable more effective communication than text-based messages in the Nigerian digital context?

This study responds to a paucity of empirical work examining the multimodal dimensions of digital health advocacy in Nigerian communication scholarship (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023). It also provides evidence-based insights into effective drug prevention messaging designed for African contexts. By foregrounding the analytical primacy of visual and multimodal elements over text, it challenges prevailing assumptions about communication efficacy in multilingual societies. The findings contribute to theoretical discussions about multimodal literacy, digital activism, and the semiotics of persuasion in contemporary African media ecologies (Ngige & Badekale, 2022).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The literature review synthesises existing scholarship on drug abuse in Nigeria, digital health communication, and multimodal discourse analysis. The methodology section explicates the analytical framework and procedures employed in examining the selected videos. The findings section presents detailed multimodal analyses of representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to communication effectiveness and cultural context, whilst the conclusion draws out the implications for theory and practice.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Drug Abuse Crisis in Nigeria: Dimensions and Responses

Nigeria's drug abuse epidemic has intensified dramatically over the past decade, evolving from a peripheral public health concern into a central national crisis demanding urgent, multisectoral responses (Adamson et al., 2023). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2024 survey revealed that 14.3 million Nigerians aged 15–64—representing approximately 14.4% of this demographic—engage in substance abuse, a prevalence rate significantly higher than the global average of 5.5% (UNODC, 2024). Cannabis remains the most commonly abused substance, followed by pharmaceutical opioids (particularly tramadol and

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codeine), amphetamine-type stimulants, and increasingly, synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine produced in clandestine laboratories (NDLEA, 2023).

The demographic profile of drug users in Nigeria reveals particularly concerning patterns. Adolescents and young adults aged 15–35 constitute the largest proportion of substance abusers, with males outnumbering females at a ratio of approximately 5:1, though female drug use has been rising steadily (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023). Geographical analysis indicates that whilst urban centres—especially Lagos, Abuja, Kano, and Port Harcourt—exhibit higher absolute numbers of users, rural areas show alarming growth rates, partly attributable to agricultural unemployment and limited recreational alternatives (Adamson et al., 2023). Socioeconomic factors including poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, family dysfunction, and the erosion of traditional value systems have been identified as primary drivers of initiation and sustained use (Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

The consequences of this epidemic manifest across multiple domains. Individual health impacts include neurological damage, cardiovascular complications, psychiatric disorders—particularly psychosis, depression, and anxiety—infectious diseases, and premature mortality (Adamson et al., 2023). Social ramifications encompass family disintegration, school dropout, criminal involvement, gender-based violence, and intergenerational trauma (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023). Economic costs—calculated through lost productivity, healthcare expenditure, and crime-related expenses—are estimated at billions of naira annually (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023).

Governmental and non-governmental responses have encompassed supply reduction strategies (law enforcement, border control), demand reduction initiatives (prevention, treatment, rehabilitation), and harm reduction programmes. Prevention campaigns have, however, historically suffered from limited reach, cultural insensitivity, moralistic messaging that stigmatises users, and inadequate engagement with target audiences' lived realities. Recognition of these limitations has prompted stakeholders to explore innovative communication channels, particularly those leveraging digital platforms and multimodal storytelling (Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

### 2.2 Digital Health Communication and Social Media Advocacy in Nigeria

The digital revolution has reconfigured the terrain of health communication in Nigeria, with social media platforms emerging as pivotal sites for information dissemination, community mobilisation, and behavioural change advocacy (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023). Facebook, with tens of millions of Nigerian users, constitutes the country's most widely adopted social media platform, transcending barriers of geography, socioeconomic status, and age (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023). The platform's affordances—including multimedia sharing capabilities, algorithmic content distribution, social networking features, and mobile accessibility—position it as an ideal medium for public health campaigns targeting mass audiences.

Scholarly investigations into digital health communication in Nigeria have documented both opportunities and challenges. Oluga and Soriwei (2022) analysed COVID-19 information campaigns on Nigerian social media, finding that visual content—particularly infographics and short videos—generated significantly higher engagement rates than text-based posts, suggesting audience preferences for multimodal formats. Similarly, Ngige and Badekale (2022) examined mental health advocacy on Twitter and Instagram, concluding that personal narratives conveyed through visual storytelling evoked stronger empathetic responses and reduced stigma more effectively than didactic, information-heavy messages.

In the specific domain of substance abuse prevention, emerging research indicates that digital campaigns employing narrative techniques, peer testimonials, and culturally resonant imagery achieve greater penetration among at-risk youth populations than traditional media approaches (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023). Ugwuoke et al. (2024) conducted focus groups with Nigerian university students, revealing that participants perceived social media anti-drug videos as more authentic, relatable, and persuasive than government-produced television commercials, which were often dismissed as preachy or disconnected from youth realities. This finding points to the importance of understanding how message design—particularly the strategic deployment of multimodal resources—shapes reception and persuasiveness.

Critical gaps persist, however, in scholarly understanding of the specific multimodal mechanisms through which digital health messages achieve their effects. Whilst studies have established correlations between multimodal content and engagement metrics, few have undertaken systematic semiotic analyses of how visual composition, colour, gesture, sound, and spatial arrangements function as meaning-making resources within Nigerian digital contexts (Adegbola &

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Olorunnisola, 2023). This study addresses this gap by applying multimodal discourse analysis to high-engagement anti-drug campaign videos.

**2.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Foundations**

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) emerged in the late twentieth century as communication scholars and semioticians recognised that meaning-making in contemporary societies increasingly relies on the orchestrated deployment of multiple semiotic modes beyond verbal language (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). Rejecting logocentrism—the traditional privileging of linguistic text as the primary carrier of meaning—MDA posits that visual images, gestures, spatial arrangements, colours, sounds, and other semiotic resources constitute equally legitimate and often more powerful modes of communication (Jewitt et al., 2023).

Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, pioneers of social semiotic approaches to multimodality, developed comprehensive analytical frameworks for investigating how different modes contribute to meaning construction (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020, 2021). Their grammar of visual design identifies three metafunctions through which visual and multimodal texts operate: representational (how semiotic resources depict actors, actions, and circumstances), interactive (how texts position viewers and construct relationships between represented participants and audiences), and compositional (how elements are arranged to create coherent, hierarchically organised wholes) (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021).

In their more recent publications, Kress and Van Leeuwen extended their theoretical apparatus to address digital multimodality, acknowledging how screen-based communication platforms enable dynamic, temporally unfolding combinations of modes that were impossible in static print media (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). They emphasise that digital videos particularly exemplify multimodal complexity, synchronising visual composition, movement, gesture, facial expression, colour, music, sound effects, and spoken language to create layered, polysemic texts open to multiple interpretive pathways (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). This theoretical development is especially pertinent for analysing social media campaign videos, which exploit these affordances to maximise persuasive impact (Jewitt et al., 2023).

Applications of Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework across diverse communication disciplines have affirmed MDA's utility for unpacking the persuasive mechanics of multimodal texts (Jewitt et al., 2023). In African contexts, multimodal analysis remains relatively nascent, though growing scholarly attention recognises its relevance. Ngige and Badekale (2022) applied MDA to Nigerian political campaign posters, revealing how visual composition, colour choices, and symbolic imagery constructed candidate personas and mobilised ethnic identities. Oluga and Soriwei (2022) analysed Nollywood film posters, demonstrating how visual semiotics communicated genre conventions and attracted audiences across linguistic boundaries. Applications to digital health communication, particularly substance abuse prevention, remain largely absent from Nigerian communication scholarship—a gap this study seeks to address.

**2.4 Visual Communication and Persuasion in Multimodal Texts**

The persuasive advantages of visual and multimodal communication over purely textual messages have been extensively documented across psychological, communication, and marketing research traditions. Visual communication operates through different persuasive mechanisms than linguistic argumentation. Whilst text-based messages rely primarily on logical reasoning and explicit propositional content, visual images engage emotional responses, activate embodied experiences, and evoke culturally embedded associations that bypass conscious cognitive filtering (Messaris & Abraham, 2022). In health communication contexts, visual depictions of consequences—showing rather than telling—create visceral responses that statistics and verbal warnings often fail to elicit (Noar et al., 2023). For anti-drug campaigns, visual representations of physical deterioration, family suffering, or lost opportunities may therefore prove more persuasive than informational pamphlets enumerating health risks.

Colour, a fundamental visual element, carries profound symbolic and psychological significance that varies across cultural contexts. In Nigerian cultural systems, colours encode complex meanings: white signifies purity and spirituality in many ethnic traditions; red connotes danger but also vitality; black represents mystery or evil in some contexts whilst symbolising strength in others; and green evokes natural life and renewal (Ngige & Badekale, 2022). Campaign videos that deploy colour palettes aligned with cultural symbolism enhance message resonance and interpretability (Oluga & Soriwei, 2022).

Gestural communication and embodied performance constitute additional powerful semiotic

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resources, particularly in orality-oriented cultures where bodily expression carries primary communicative weight. Anti-drug campaign videos featuring dramatic performances leverage these cultural resources, using embodied enactments of addiction, suffering, and recovery to construct emotionally compelling narratives (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023).

Sonic elements—including music, sound effects, voice quality, and audio-visual synchronisation—further amplify multimodal persuasive power (Van Leeuwen, 2022). Music evokes emotional states, establishes cultural identities, and enhances message memorability (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). In Nigerian contexts, musical genres carry demographic and ideological associations: Afrobeats signals youth culture and contemporary identity; highlife evokes nostalgia and traditional values; gospel music connotes religious morality; and hip-hop indexes urban cosmopolitanism (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023). Campaign videos employing musical formats potentially harness these associations to frame anti-drug messages within familiar, appealing packages that facilitate audience identification and message internalisation (Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

## III. Data Analysis

This section presents a systematic multimodal discourse analysis of five high-engagement Facebook anti-drug campaign videos, applying Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020, 2021) framework for examining representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. Each video is analysed individually before findings are synthesised across the corpus.

### 3.1 Methodology

The analytical framework draws upon Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2021) three metafunctions of visual grammar: representational structures (how semiotic resources depict participants, actions, and circumstances), interactive meanings (how visual elements position viewers and establish relationships), and compositional arrangements (how elements combine to create coherent meaning). The analysis examines multiple semiotic modes including visual composition, colour symbolism, gestural communication, spatial arrangements, sonic elements, embodied performances, and their interplay (Jewitt et al., 2023; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). This approach acknowledges that digital videos constitute complex multimodal texts where meaning emerges from the orchestrated deployment of diverse semiotic resources rather than from any single mode in isolation (Van Leeuwen, 2022).

The selected videos were purposively sampled based on engagement metrics (ranging from 640,000 to 73 million views), generic diversity (musical performance and dramatic skits), and their explicit anti-drug messaging targeting Nigerian audiences. Transcripts were generated detailing visual elements, actions, spoken content, sonic features, and temporal sequences. Analysis proceeded iteratively, examining each video multiple times to identify salient multimodal patterns, then comparing across videos to establish recurrent themes and divergent strategies.

### 3.2 Individual Video Analyses

#### 3.2.1 Video 1: Musical Performance and Embodied Persuasion

Video 1 employs a musical format featuring a solo male performer delivering an anti-drug message through song in Nigerian Pidgin English. The representational structure centres on a single social actor positioned in domestic space, signifying ordinariness and accessibility rather than institutional authority (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). The performer's visual appearance—black beret cap, sleeveless vest—indexes street culture and urban youth identity, constructing authenticity through sartorial codes recognisable to target audiences (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023). Rather than depicting an idealised, distant figure, the video presents someone from within the community, enhancing credibility and identification (Messaris & Abraham, 2022).

The song's lyrical content enumerates multiple street names for hard drugs prevalent in Nigerian contexts—*gbana*, *Molly*, cocaine, ice, *loud*, *colos*—demonstrating insider knowledge that validates the speaker's authority whilst simultaneously educating viewers about the diverse substances threatening communities (Ugwuoke et al., 2024). The repetitive chorus structure—"Sim ba o" (Say no)—functions as a mnemonic device, facilitating retention and potential peer-to-peer transmission. This call-and-response format draws upon African oral tradition, where communal participation in meaning-making constitutes a fundamental cultural practice.

The performer's gestural communication carries substantial semiotic weight. Vigorous hand demonstrations accompanying the lyrics create embodied emphasis, translating abstract warnings into physical performance that viewers can viscerally experience. In Nigerian communication contexts, paralinguistic features often carry primary

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rather than supplementary meaning (Oluga & Soriwei, 2022). The opening cough operates as a powerful indexical sign, metonymically evoking the respiratory damage associated with drug use whilst establishing verisimilitude—this performer speaks from experience or proximate observation (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021).

The sonic dimension merits particular attention. Music itself constitutes a culturally resonant vehicle for health messaging in Nigerian contexts, where musical genres carry demographic associations and facilitate engagement across literacy levels (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023). The informal, conversational musical style—eschewing high production values for raw authenticity—aligns with social media aesthetics that privilege user-generated content over corporate polish. This sonic choice constructs the message as peer communication rather than top-down instruction, potentially reducing psychological resistance among youth audiences historically resistant to didactic health campaigns.

Compositionally, the video's simplicity—single performer, stationary camera, minimal editing—paradoxically enhances impact by focusing attention entirely on the embodied performance and lyrical content (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). The domestic setting situates the anti-drug message within everyday lived spaces rather than institutional or clinical environments, suggesting that drug resistance belongs to ordinary life rather than expert domains (Ngige & Badekale, 2022).

Crucially, the video's latter portion introduces a testimonial dimension: "No be say I no dey hear when dey say make I stop oh I no fit stop / I swear I wan stop somebody help me stop." This shift from preventive to rehabilitative messaging acknowledges addiction's compulsive nature, moving beyond simplistic "just say no" rhetoric to recognise the neurobiological and psychological complexities of substance dependence (Adamson et al., 2023). This empathetic turn, embedded within the musical structure, constructs drug users not as moral failures but as individuals requiring community support—a framing that reduces stigma whilst maintaining anti-use messaging.

### 3.2.2 Video 2: Dramatic Enactment and Consequence Visualisation

Video 2 shifts from musical to dramatic genre, employing a narrative skit format to visualise drug use consequences. The representational structure depicts two young men in a compound setting where firewood cooking occurs—a visual marker of Nigerian domestic space immediately recognisable to local audiences (Oluga & Soriwei, 2022). This spatial specificity grounds the narrative in cultural authenticity, communicating that drug abuse constitutes a local rather than foreign problem (Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

The visual narrative unfolds through clear cause-effect sequencing: drug consumption (smoking weed) directly produces catastrophic consequences (psychotic break, violence against a friend). This representational choice embodies what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2021) term "narrative processes"—actions that depict events unfolding over time with clear vectors connecting actors and outcomes. The temporal immediacy—"suddenly he goes crazy"—constructs drug effects as swift and unpredictable, countering potential beliefs that occasional use remains controllable (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023).

The visual depiction of undressing signals loss of social inhibition and cultural transgression. In Nigerian contexts where public nudity constitutes a profound taboo, this act communicates complete dissociation from normative values and community belonging (Ngige & Badekale, 2022). The embodied performance—the actor's physical representation of psychosis—operates through what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) identify as the visual mode's capacity to show rather than tell, creating visceral impact that verbal description cannot match.

The culminating action—pouring hot water on a friend—visualises harm beyond self-destruction, depicting drug use as antisocial violence that endangers others. This representational strategy addresses communal rather than individualistic value systems prevalent in Nigerian societies, where social harmony and collective wellbeing carry significant moral weight (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023). The victim's flight, accompanied by evident pain, positions viewers as witnesses to preventable tragedy, potentially evoking empathetic distress and motivating protective behaviours (Noar et al., 2023).

The sonic background—"on colos"—identifies the specific substance, educating viewers whilst connecting the visual horror to recognisable drug nomenclature. The video's extraordinary engagement—54 million views—demonstrates the persuasive power of dramatic visualisation over statistical or textual warnings (Messaris & Abraham, 2022). Visual depiction of consequences creates emotional responses that bypass cognitive defences, making viewers feel rather than merely know about drug dangers.

Compositionally, the video employs documentary-style realism—handheld camera, natural lighting, authentic setting—constructing the

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events as plausible occurrences rather than staged fiction. This aesthetic choice enhances perceived threat susceptibility, a key determinant of health behaviour change (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023).

**3.2.3 Video 3: Hallucination and Supernatural Horror**

Video 3 employs hallucination as its central representational strategy, visualising the subjective mental distortions produced by drug consumption. The video depicts two characters in a compound setting, with an elderly man initiating drug use—a significant representational choice that challenges stereotypes associating drug abuse exclusively with youth (Adamson et al., 2023). This demographic diversification broadens message relevance whilst signalling that drug vulnerability transcends age boundaries.

The visual progression from initial discomfort through escalating hallucination to collapse constructs drug effects as an uncontrollable cascade. The performer's embodied enactment of distress—physical gestures indicating disorientation, attempts at reassurance followed by recognition of deterioration—creates a visual narrative accessible across literacy levels. The hallucination's culmination in seeing "a big disfigured head like a giant demon" introduces supernatural horror imagery that resonates with Nigerian spiritual worldviews (Ngige & Badekale, 2022).

This visual choice is culturally strategic. Nigerian cosmologies frequently interpret extreme mental states through spiritual frameworks, attributing psychological disturbances to supernatural forces. By visually representing hallucinations as demonic manifestations, the video validates these interpretative frameworks whilst attributing their origin to drug consumption rather than spiritual attack—thereby constructing drug use as spiritually dangerous behaviour (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023). This syncretic messaging strategy demonstrates sophisticated cultural adaptation, embedding biomedical warnings within indigenous belief systems (Adamson et al., 2023).

The peer's initial encouragement followed by inability to provide assistance visualises the inadequacy of social support once drug effects commence. This representational structure indicts not only individual users but peer networks that facilitate initiation, addressing the social ecology of drug abuse documented in Nigerian research (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023; Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

The sonic element—background laughter—creates disturbing ironic distance. Whilst the visual mode depicts terror and collapse, the audio track suggests mockery or entertainment, creating multimodal dissonance that may serve multiple functions: signalling the video's performative nature (preventing viewer distress), suggesting community stigmatisation of users, or highlighting the trivialisation of drug dangers (Van Leeuwen, 2022). This sonic-visual tension exemplifies how multimodal texts create layered meanings unavailable to monomodal communication (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021).

With 640,000 views, this video demonstrates substantial though comparatively lower engagement than Videos 2 and 4, possibly reflecting genre preferences or algorithmic distribution patterns rather than message effectiveness (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023).

**3.2.4 Video 4: Peer Influence and Escalating Catastrophe**

Video 4 constructs its anti-drug narrative through paired hallucination sequences, depicting two friends sequentially experiencing drug-induced psychotic episodes. The opening visual image—"a very big, huge and long hard drug in form of a cigarette"—employs exaggeration for comedic and cautionary effect, hyperbolically representing potency whilst creating memorable visual distinctiveness (Messaris & Abraham, 2022).

The first user's immediate distress—knocking his head with his hands—visually represents internal pain and cognitive disruption that cannot be directly depicted (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). His hallucination—seeing a house burning and attempting to extinguish imaginary flames—visualises how drug-induced perceptual distortions produce inappropriate, potentially dangerous behaviours. The pouring of water on a non-burning house creates visual absurdity that simultaneously generates entertainment value (facilitating viral sharing) and demonstrates the complete dissociation from reality that hallucinogens produce.

The narrative's crucial turn occurs when the second friend "collects the long cigarette and starts puffing"—a visual representation of peer influence mechanisms extensively documented in substance abuse research (Ugwuoke et al., 2024). This sequence constructs drug use as socially transmitted behaviour, visually demonstrating how witnessing use, even with observable negative consequences, fails to deter susceptible peers (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023).

The second hallucination sequence—diving into an imaginary river and "swimming" on rough land—escalates the absurdity whilst visualising serious physical danger. The removal of clothing prior to the imagined dive invokes cultural taboos

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surrounding public nudity whilst depicting loss of social awareness (Ngige & Badekale, 2022). The landing on rough terrain, followed by continued swimming motions, powerfully visualises the persistence of hallucination despite contradictory sensory evidence—a representation of psychotic dissociation that textual description could not achieve with equivalent impact (Messaris & Abraham, 2022).

Compositionally, the parallel structure—two users, two hallucinations, escalating absurdity—creates rhythmic progression that maintains viewer engagement whilst reinforcing the message through repetition (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). The video's extraordinary 73 million views—the highest in this corpus—suggests that this combination of humour, peer narrative, and vivid consequence visualisation achieves optimal virality whilst maintaining persuasive integrity (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023).

The video explicitly addresses peer influence, constructing it as a primary risk factor. This aligns with epidemiological research identifying peer pressure as a dominant initiation pathway among Nigerian youth (NDLEA, 2023; Adamson et al., 2023). By visualising this social process rather than merely mentioning it, the video enables viewers to recognise and potentially resist similar situations in their own lives.

### 3.2.5 Video 5: Solitary Use and Individual Catastrophe

Video 5 returns to solitary drug use, depicting a young man "sitting comfortably on a water tank"—a spatial choice that introduces vertical elevation, potentially symbolising precarious positioning or heightened vulnerability (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). The immediate transition from comfort to crisis because almost immediately, his situation changed as he jumped, emphasises the rapidity with which drug effects destabilise normality.

The hallucination he experienced by seeing a large river and diving from an elevated position visualises the most dangerous potential consequence; actions that would cause death or serious injury if the hallucination did not fortuitously align with environmental reality (landing in a sand heap rather than concrete or water). This representational strategy constructs drug use as potentially fatal, where survival depends on chance rather than user control (Adamson et al., 2023).

The fortunate outcome where he landed on a heap of sand rather than concrete introduces narrative complexity. Unlike Videos 2–4, where consequences prove uniformly catastrophic, Video 5 depicts luck preventing tragedy. This could function either as a cautionary reminder that luck runs out (implicit warning) or as an inadvertent suggestion that drug use sometimes escapes consequences (undermining deterrence). The concluding commentary—"Many of our youth who are in psychiatric hospitals are victims of hard drugs. Very many of them have become public nuisance and violent"—provides textual framing that forecloses the lucky-escape interpretation, explicitly connecting depicted behaviour to psychiatric hospitalisation and antisocial outcomes (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023).

The reference to psychiatric hospitals and public nuisance invokes community anxieties about mental illness and social disorder, positioning drug users as threats to collective wellbeing. Whilst this framing may enhance deterrence through fear appeals, it simultaneously risks stigmatising individuals with substance use disorders, potentially deterring help-seeking (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023). This tension exemplifies the ethical complexities inherent in fear-based health communication (Noar et al., 2023).

Visually, the solo performance emphasises individual agency and responsibility—unlike Videos 2 and 4's peer contexts, this user makes a solitary choice with solitary consequences. This representational variability across the corpus reflects an understanding that drug initiation occurs through multiple pathways requiring diverse preventive messages (Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

### Synthesis of Multimodal Strategies Across Videos

Examining the five videos as a corpus reveals systematic deployment of multimodal resources to construct anti-drug narratives. Six major thematic and strategic patterns emerge.

### Privileging Visual Over Verbal Communication

All videos prioritise visual and embodied modes over linguistic text. Where verbal language appears—Video 1's lyrics, background audio in other videos—it functions in a subordinate or complementary relationship to visual representation rather than carrying primary semantic weight (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). This design reflects awareness that Nigerian audiences encompass diverse linguistic competencies (English, Pidgin, indigenous languages) and literacy levels, necessitating communication strategies that transcend verbal language barriers. The visual depictions—psychotic breaks, hallucinations,

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violence, absurd behaviours—communicate through showing rather than telling, exploiting vision's capacity for simultaneous multi-element presentation that linear verbal discourse cannot match (Messaris & Abraham, 2022). A single frame depicting someone pouring water on a non-burning house communicates more immediately and memorably than paragraphs describing hallucination-induced behaviour.

**Embodied Performance as Primary Semiotic Mode**

Across all videos, embodied performance—actors physically enacting drug consumption, distress, hallucination, violence—constitutes the central meaning-making resource. In Videos 2–5, performers use their bodies to represent psychosis, demonstrating what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) identify as the body's unique capacity to simultaneously represent and be the represented. Video 1's gestural emphasis similarly employs embodiment to amplify verbal warnings.

This reliance on embodied communication aligns with Nigerian cultural traditions where bodily expression carries primary semantic weight. The performers' physical enactments operate as cultural translation, rendering biomedical concepts (psychosis, hallucination, compulsion) into culturally resonant performative idioms (Oluga & Soriwei, 2022). Viewers need not understand psychiatric terminology to comprehend that something catastrophic occurs when drugs enter bodies.

**Spatial Authenticity and Cultural Grounding**

All videos situate action in recognisably Nigerian spaces: compounds, domestic settings featuring firewood cooking, water tanks. These spatial choices construct the anti-drug message as locally relevant rather than imported discourse (Ngige & Badekale, 2022). The visual semiotics of space communicate "this happens here, to people like us, in places like ours"—a crucial persuasive element given historical tendencies to frame drug abuse as a foreign-originated problem (Asemah & Edegoh, 2023).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2021) argue that spatial arrangements in visual texts construct ideological positions about belonging and otherness. By situating drug use and its consequences in familiar Nigerian settings, these videos resist distancing mechanisms that might allow viewers to dismiss the threat as irrelevant to their communities (Ugwuoke et al., 2024).

**Consequence Visualisation Through Dramatic Narrative**

Four of five videos employ dramatic narrative structures depicting cause (drug consumption) producing effect (catastrophic consequences). This narrative approach exploits storytelling's persuasive advantages: engagement through dramatic tension, emotional identification with characters, and memorable concrete exemplars rather than abstract statistics.

The specific consequences visualised fall into three categories: physical violence towards others (Video 2), absurd behaviours revealing complete reality dissociation (Videos 3, 4, 5), and testimonial acknowledgement of addiction's compulsive nature (Video 1). This diversity prevents message fatigue whilst addressing multiple deterrent motivations—fear of harming loved ones, fear of social humiliation, and fear of losing autonomy.

Consequences manifest immediately within video timeframes, compressing what might be gradual deterioration into dramatic instant transformation. This temporal compression serves persuasive functions—constructing drug effects as unpredictable and uncontrollable—but potentially misrepresents actual substance abuse trajectories where consequences accumulate progressively (Adamson et al., 2023). The representational choice prioritises dramatic impact over epidemiological accuracy.

**Humour and Horror: Affective Ambivalence**

The videos create affectively complex responses by combining horror (psychosis, violence, collapse) with elements of humour or absurdity (exaggerated cigarette size, swimming on land, background laughter). This tonal ambivalence reflects social media content conventions where entertainment value drives sharing and engagement (Adegbola & Olorunnisola, 2023).

From a multimodal perspective, this combination demonstrates how different semiotic modes can carry contradictory affective valences simultaneously. Visual modes depict horror whilst sonic elements (laughter) or compositional choices (absurdist exaggeration) introduce levity (Van Leeuwen, 2022). The surface entertainment facilitates viral distribution whilst underlying warnings communicate serious consequences. The risk, however, is trivialisation: if viewers focus on comedic elements, deterrent impact may diminish (Noar et al., 2023). The balance between entertainment (facilitating reach) and gravity (ensuring impact) represents a persistent tension in

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social media health communication (Oluga & Soriwei, 2022).

**Peer and Social Contexts**

Three videos (2, 3, 4) explicitly depict social contexts for drug use—peers present during consumption, encouraging use, or sequentially using after witnessing consequences. These representational choices acknowledge social dimensions of substance abuse well-established in research: peer influence as an initiation mechanism and social networks as maintenance systems (Chikere & Mayowa, 2023; Ugwuoke et al., 2024). By visualising these social processes, the videos enable viewers to recognise parallel situations in their own lives, potentially enhancing self-efficacy for resistance. Video 4's depiction of someone using despite witnessing a friend's negative experience is particularly instructive, acknowledging that knowledge of consequences does not automatically prevent use—a reality often obscured in simplistic campaigns.

## IV. Conclusion

This study has applied Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020, 2021) multimodal discourse analysis framework to five high-engagement Facebook anti-drug campaign videos targeting Nigerian audiences. The analysis demonstrates that multimodal elements—particularly visual consequence depiction, embodied performance, and culturally grounded spatial representation—function as primary meaning-making resources, operating with greater communicative power than text-based messaging. Six major strategies characterise the corpus: privileging visual over verbal communication; centring embodied performance; situating narratives in culturally authentic spaces; visualising dramatic consequences through narrative structures; combining horror and humour for affective complexity; and depicting social contexts for drug use. Together, these strategies enable the videos to transcend literacy barriers, communicate across linguistic diversity, create visceral affective responses, and achieve wide circulation.

The findings carry implications for both communication theory and health promotion practice. Theoretically, the study affirms the necessity of cultural contextualisation when applying multimodal frameworks to non-Western settings. For practitioners, it provides evidence that digital health campaigns in Nigeria should prioritise multimodal approaches—visual storytelling, embodied performance, cultural authenticity—over the straightforward digitisation of text-heavy formats. The considerable reach achieved by these low-budget, user-generated videos confirms that cultural resonance and multimodal design carry more weight than professional production values. Effective prevention ultimately requires coordinated efforts spanning communication, policy, treatment infrastructure, and economic opportunity (Adamson et al., 2023); communication campaigns, however well-crafted, cannot substitute for interventions addressing the structural determinants of drug abuse.

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