

Signs, Symbols, and Persuasion in Digital Commercial Discourse: A Semiotic Comparison of Saudi Arabia and Egypt

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Abstract

The rise of online advertising in the Arab world has urged the researchers to investigate how persuasive messages are generated through the interplay of language, images, and symbols. This study conducts a comparative semiotic analysis to explore the use of signs, symbols, and multimodal strategies in digital commercial discourse in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The purpose of the study is to investigate how persuasive strategies are constructed and how culturally embedded semiotic resources reflect social values, norms, and audience expectations in the two contexts. A qualitative approach was adopted to analyze a selected sample of advertisements collected from social media and e-commerce platforms. Much attention is paid to linguistic choices, visuals, and layout. The findings reveal that both contexts rely on culturally recognizable symbols to enhance credibility and emotional appeal, with Saudi advertisements emphasizing themes of tradition, social cohesion, and national identity, while Egyptian advertisements frequently use colloquial language, humor, and everyday social scenes to create relatability and engagement. The results also show that cultural adaptation enhances the persuasiveness of the messages and increases audience engagement. The study highlights the significance of semiotic awareness and multimodal materials in digital advertisements and language acquisition.

Keywords: semiotic analysis, digital commercial discourse, multimodal communication, cross-cultural comparison, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

In the Arab countries, the growth of online advertising becomes notable, with brands customizing visuals and verbal messages to engage local audiences. Recent research demonstrates that culturally relevant visual storytelling and narrative strategies significantly influence engagement and brand perception in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) social media advertising, where authenticity and emotional resonance with local culture are key to campaign success (Mohamed, 2025).

Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols, and the mechanisms that generate meaning. It is an important tool used by researchers to analyze how advertisements communicate persuasive messages. Researchers, such as Hal (2021) and Ibrahim (2022), affirm that advertising discourse encompasses various linguistic and visual elements. These elements interact together to convey clear and hidden meanings. These meanings are formed by culture and ideology. Multimodal semiotic analysis further highlights how diverse semiotic modes (e.g., text, visuals, layout) interact to create persuasive communication, reinforcing the importance of considering these elements collectively rather than in isolation (Ibrahim, 2022; Saussure, 1983; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Halliday, 1994; Jewitt et al., 2016).

In spite of the growing interest in semiotic strategies, very few researchers have compared how these strategies are used across different Arab cultures. Studies on Saudi advertising, for instance, highlight how national symbols are employed to reflect social values and identity within commercial discourse (Albogami et al., 2025). Nonetheless, there is limited research on how culturally embedded semiotic resources impact persuasive strategies in digital advertisements in Arab countries. To address this gap, the present study conducts a comparative semiotic analysis of digital commercial discourse in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How are persuasive strategies constructed in digital advertisements in Saudi Arabia and Egypt through the use of signs, symbols, and multimodal elements?
2. How do culturally embedded semiotic resources reflect social values in the two contexts?
3. What are the semiotic similarities and differences between Saudi and Egyptian digital advertisements?

By attempting to address these questions, the recent study shows the importance of semiotic and cultural awareness in perceiving online advertisements. It also highlights the value of integrating authentic multimodal materials into language acquisition and intercultural communication training to enhance learners' communicative competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Semiotics and Meaning Construction in Advertising

Semiotics provides the researchers with theoretical frameworks that help them to understand how advertising communicates persuasive messages through signs and symbols. Communication in semiotic theories is viewed as an interaction of signifiers, the ideas they represent, and cultural codes. According to Chandler (2017), these codes are culturally shared by the speakers and the listeners (Chandler, 2017). In advertising discourse, signs function beyond their denotative level. They also have some functions at the connotative level. Therefore, they can evoke cultural values and ideological meaning. Barthes (1977) demonstrated that visual images in media carry ideological meanings that naturalize cultural assumptions and social norms, making them powerful tools for persuasion (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Advertising uses symbols to form consumer's perception and emotions about the products. Williamson (1978) affirmed that advertisements connect products with culturally valued symbols. Thus, consumption becomes a means of achieving social or personal aspirations. In the same way, Cook (2001) emphasized that advertising is a form of discourse shaped by some cultural factors, where textual and visual elements work together to construct meaning beyond the explicit message.

The persuasive strength of advertising comes from its ability to depend on culturally shared knowledge. For example, the colors of the national flag, the traditional clothes, family scenes, or religious figures function as cultural cues that support trust among consumers. These symbols help advertisers to convey social messages quickly and effectively, especially in digital contexts where audience attention is limited. As a result, semiotic analysis has become a key methodological approach for examining how commercial messages construct identity, values, and social relationships through culturally embedded representations (Ledin & Machin, 2020; Beasley & Danesi, 2002; De Mooij, 2019; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007).

2.2 Multimodal Communication in Digital Advertising

The shift towards digital media makes advertising more multimodal. Multimodality refers to the integration of multiple semiotic modes—such as language, images, typography, color, sound, and spatial design—to produce meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Rather than operating independently, these modes interact to create a unified persuasive effect. Visual elements in advertisements attract attention and evoke emotions. Texts, on the other hand, guide the consumers' perception. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explained how design features such as layout, focus, and color convey meaningful messages. For example, the designers can add some elements within a layout to signal importance. Not only colors but also color schemes may reflect cultural associations such as luxury, trust, or tradition (Oswald, 2015; Rodgers & Thorson, 2017).

In digital spaces, multimodal communication is especially important because social media is interactive and fast-paced. Rodgers and Thorson (2017) note that digital advertising often combines visual storytelling, concise text, and interactive features to increase user engagement. The success of these messages draws on how well these modes work together and match viewers' expectations. When visual and linguistic elements reinforce each other, the persuasive impact is enhanced.

Digital platforms also support the use of culturally tailored visuals and localized language to increase relevance. Short video clips, influencer imagery, and everyday social scenes are commonly used to create authenticity and relatability. Multimodal analysis is therefore essential for understanding how contemporary advertising constructs meaning through the strategic orchestration of semiotic resources rather than through language alone.

2.3 Culture and Cross-Cultural Variation in Advertising

Advertising methods vary immensely from one society to another because the meaning is shaped by cultural norms. Cultural values impact the content of advertising. In addition, they affect the persuasion tools, ways of communication, and symbols. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension framework is widely employed to explain differences between collectivism and individualism. In collectivist cultures, advertising focuses on family, social harmony, and group identity. In individualistic societies, on the other hand, the focus is on personal accomplishments and independence.

Advertising research has shown that advertisements become more effective if they match local culture. De Mooij (2019) points out that consumers perceive advertising through their culture. Therefore, De Mooij asserts that localization is the main persuasion tool in advertising discourse. Symbols, humor styles, language choices, and emotional appeals must align with local cultural expectations to achieve credibility and engagement.

In Arab societies, cultural communication is strongly influenced by shared values such as social cohesion, respect for tradition, religious identity, and family orientation. Advertising in the Arab region usually uses culture-based images, such as respectful gender roles, and

scenes that show social relationships. By the same token, linguistic variation matters in advertising discourse. For example, Modern Standard Arabic is often avoided in advertising discourse, as it conveys a formal tone. Dialectal Arabic is frequently used in commercial contexts to create intimacy and relatability (Ryding, 2005).

Egyptian media discourse is marked by the use of colloquial language. It makes communication easier and more friendly. Gulf advertising discourse, on the other hand, highlights luxury and national pride. The purpose behind such a kind of discourse is to reflect the significance of national identity and social values. These differences highlight the need for context-specific analysis rather than treating Arab advertising as a homogeneous category (Williamson, 1978; Bhatti & Bashir, 2024; Chen & Cheung, 2022; Dalamu, 2021).

2.4 Semiotic Studies of Arab and Digital Commercial Discourse

Research on advertising in Arab contexts has grown in recent years, particularly in relation to globalization and digital transformation. Scholars have examined how local cultural identities are negotiated within contemporary media environments. Al-Azzam and Al-Khalil (2014), for example, found that Arab advertisements frequently draw on cultural symbols such as traditional dress, family settings, and religious references to reinforce social values and establish audience trust. Other studies have explored the balance between global branding strategies and local cultural adaptation. As online shopping expands, advertisers begin to produce localized digital content. The companies attempted to reflect national identity and everyday life. Digital platforms accelerate the localization through linguistic choices, visuals, and themes (Faizullah & Arslan, 2024; Harnum, 2023; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023; Heathy, 2020; Mahmood et al., 2022).

There is a substantial amount of research on advertising discourse. However, comparative research across different Arab countries is still limited. Most of the recent studies are case studies. That is, they focus on a single country. Some studies examine Arab advertising as a whole without any systematic comparison. In addition, many studies focus on traditional media rather than digital environments. They overlooked the multimodal and interactive features of the digital settings. The comparative semiotic research is significant. It helps researchers and advertisers understand the intra-regional diversity. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt differ in media culture, linguistic practices, social norms, and audience expectations. A comparative study can show how similar cultural backgrounds can produce different persuasive strategies and symbols.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design based on multimodal semiotic analysis. This research design is chosen as the study attempts to interpret meanings, cultural references, and persuasive tools embedded in digital advertisements. The study aims at neither measuring the frequencies nor testing statistical relationships. The researcher employs an interpretive, cross-cultural approach to explore how signs, symbols, and visuals interact within social and cultural settings. A comparative design was employed to detect the similarities and differences in persuasive semiotic practices in advertising discourse in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The analysis was informed by key semiotic and multimodal frameworks, particularly concepts related to denotation and connotation and the interaction of modes such as text, image, color, and layout as proposed in multimodal discourse studies.

3.2 Data Sources

The study dataset consisted of a sample of purposefully selected online advertisements. These advertisements are gathered from widely used social media platforms and e-commerce websites in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. These platforms were chosen because they represent contemporary digital marketing. Further, they reflect the current commercial communication practices. The advertisements were selected according to specific criteria. First, each advertisement was publicly available online. Second, the content was intended for audiences in either Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Third, the advertisement included both linguistic and visual elements to allow for multimodal analysis. Fourth, the material represented consumer-oriented commercial promotion rather than political or public service content. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure the inclusion of advertisements that clearly reflect culturally embedded themes, symbols, and persuasive strategies relevant to each context. To maintain analytical consistency, only static digital advertisements, such as images or designed promotional posts, were included in the dataset.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed within the framework of multimodal semiotic analysis. The data analysis was conducted in five systematic stages. Each advertisement was analyzed to identify its main elements, including language features (such as tone and slogans) and visual images (such as people and settings). Further, design aspects like color, typography, and layout were examined. Second, denotative analysis was used to describe the literal content of each advertisement. Third, the analysis moved to a connotative and cultural level, interpreting implied meanings, cultural associations, and ideological messages communicated through symbols, themes, and visual narratives. Fourth, persuasive strategies were identified, with attention to emotional appeals, credibility markers, cultural alignment, humor, relatability, and the construction of identity. Finally, the findings from the Saudi and Egyptian samples were compared to determine recurring patterns, similarities, and differences in semiotic and persuasive practices. The overall analysis was thematic and interpretive, emphasizing meaning construction and pattern identification rather than quantitative measurement.

3.4 Procedures

The research procedures were carried out in four stages. First, data collection involved gathering advertisements from 2021 to 2025 from

selected social media accounts and e-commerce promotional sections in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Second, the collected advertisements were screened and reviewed according to the inclusion criteria. All non-commercial and duplicate materials were excluded. Third, the selected advertisements were organized by country and stored in a digital archive. Each item was assigned a reference code to support systematic analysis. A coding framework was developed based on semiotic and multimodal categories. The codes included references such as cultural symbols, language variety, emotional appeal, and visual themes. Each advertisement was analyzed using this coding framework. Finally, patterns within each national context were identified independently, followed by a cross-cultural comparison to determine similarities and differences in persuasive strategies and semiotic practices.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

To ensure consistent and systematic analysis, a structured coding framework based on established semiotic and multimodal theories was applied throughout the study. Every advertisement was examined using the same categories and procedures, providing analytical consistency. Detailed records of the coding and interpretation process were maintained to allow transparency and make the study replicable by other researchers. Some strategies were used to enhance the validity of the findings. The study employed real advertisements (i.e., data appropriateness) and looked at their culture (i.e., contextual validity). Further, the analysis is based on trusted theories (i.e., theoretical validity). This made the findings trustworthy.

4. Results

The analysis of digital advertisements from Saudi Arabia and Egypt showed clear differences in how signs, symbols, and multimodal strategies have been used. Each advertisement embedded its distinctive cultural persuasive strategies. In the Saudi and Egyptian contexts, advertisements relied heavily on culturally recognizable symbols to enhance credibility. Further, these recognizable symbols enhanced customers' engagement. Across the dataset, elements such as national colors, traditional dress, family scenes, and culturally familiar settings were frequently used to evoke trust and social resonance. These symbols are semiotic references that quickly convey social norms to the targeted audience. Table (1) summarizes the analytical categories applied to each ad.

Table 1. Semiotic Coding Framework Applied to All Advertisements

Advertisement	Language Variety	Dominant Visual Symbol	Emotional Appeal	Persuasive Strategy	Cultural Frame
SNB – National Day	Semi-formal MSA	National flag / green color	Pride, patriotism	National identity alignment	Formal / institutional
STC – Founding Day	Minimal text	Flag, drones, skyline	Patriotism, modernity	Heritage + innovation fusion	National pride
Almarai – Ramadan	Formal Arabic religious register	+ Lantern procession, traditional dress	Spiritual warmth, nostalgia	Collectivist / religious	Religious temporality
Snickers Egypt	Colloquial Arabic	Egyptian Chocolate bar, exaggerated expressions	Humor, relatability	Problem–solution narrative	Everyday social scene
Wadi Degla "يادوب"	Colloquial dialect song	+ Domestic settings, aging signs	Generational irony, humor	Emotional disarmament	Generational identity

4.1 Saudi Arabian Advertisements

Saudi advertisements mainly focused on tradition, unity, and national identity. Many visuals included culturally significant symbols such as the Saudi flag, traditional clothes, and family gatherings. The language used in advertisements was formal Modern Standard Arabic alongside localized expressions. These local structures were employed to convey authenticity and respect for cultural values. Emotional appeals were based on pride, community values, and hopes for a better lifestyle. The combination of visuals, layout, and language created cohesive messages that reinforced brand credibility and cultural alignment.



Figure 1. Saudi National Bank – Saudi National Day Campaign (2023)

The advertisement in figure (1) shows the SNB logo on the right in green. The logo is accompanied by a geometric symbol representing the brand. On the left, there is an Arabic slogan, “نحلم ونحقق” in addition to a note indicating اليوم الوطني السعودي ٩٣ (Saudi National Day 93). The overall color palette is minimal. The design includes two colors: green and a white background. These two colors represent SNB’s identity and the national colors of Saudi Arabia. The ad does not include additional images such as the Riyadh skyline or people. It results in a symbolic design that reflects simplicity and formality.

Textually, the ad communicates a reference to the 93rd Saudi National Day through the Arabic slogan “نحلم ونحقق” (“We Dream and Achieve”). At the denotative level, the advertisement presents the green color, the slogan, and the SNB logo on the right in a simple layout. At the connotative level, green signifies national identity and stability. The slogan stresses collective aspiration and alignment with national development. The logo’s placement boosts clients’ trust. The absence of additional visuals directs focus toward national pride and formal authority. From a semiotic and multimodal perspective, the layout and typography provide balance and authority. The interaction of visual and verbal elements positions SNB as an active participant in Saudi Arabia’s national progress. Persuasively, the advertisement appeals to collective pride and patriotism. It strengthens credibility through minimalist design. It frames the bank as socially responsible and nationally aligned.



Figure 2. Founding Day Campaign (2024)

The image in figure (2) shows a large Saudi flag carried by a person and a modern city skyline in the background. The green flag dominates the visual frame. It catches the viewer’s attention as it signals national identity. The cityscape is marked by its towering skyscrapers. In addition to the skyscrapers, there are rows of drones positioned on the ground. These drones convey technological sophistication and precision. The individual wearing dark clothes connects the Saudi citizens to the national symbol. Nonetheless, the individual remains secondary to the visual impact of the flag and the drones. The flag, at the center of the advertisement, creates a strong focus on national pride. But the muted colors of the cityscape allow the green of the flag to stand out prominently.

On a connotative level, the flag functions as a cultural and ideological sign, representing Saudi heritage, unity, and patriotism. The flag coexists with modern buildings, which reflects both tradition and modernity in the kingdom. It also asserts that technological progress is grounded on deeply rooted cultural values. The citizen carrying the flag stands for personal engagement with national identity. But the organized pattern of drones on the ground implies collective action and coordinated advancement. This coexistence of heritage and innovation portrays STC’s branding strategy. The company positions itself as both patriotic and modern.

From a semiotic and multimodal perspective, the image relies heavily on visual modes to communicate meaning. It makes use of minimal or no text. The color contrast between the green flag and the neutral city skyscrapers semiotically reinforces symbolic emphasis. That is, the bright green flag against the softer city colors makes it noticeable. The way the drones are arranged generates a sense of rhythm. Further, this way of arrangement adds visual order to the advertisement. This organized design shows both accuracy and modernity. The images together tell a story of Saudi identity and technological advancement. It shows STC as a company that respects national traditions and enables progress through modern technology.

Persuasively, the advertisement appeals to patriotism and shared cultural pride, fostering emotional resonance with the audience. By linking national symbols to technology, STC frames its services as culturally aligned rather than foreign, reinforcing trust and loyalty. The image’s strong visual cues and symbolic layering create a concise, memorable, and culturally resonant message, characteristic of contemporary Saudi digital advertising practices that integrate heritage with modernization.



Figure 3. Almarai – Ramadan Family Campaign

The Almarai Ramadan Kareem advertisement in figure (3) shows people walking through an old, narrow street. Most of the people wear traditional Saudi clothing. Men wear thobes, and women put on abayas. Children walk hand in hand with their parents. They carry lanterns. These lanterns evoke Ramadan processions. As a matter of fact, the scene features an Arabic text overlay that carries a clear religious tone: "تقبل الله صيامكم وقيامكم وصالح أعمالكم #أعمالكم من صيامكم", which translates as "May Allah accept your fasting, prayers, and good deeds." The warm light makes the scene spiritual and nostalgic. It also conveys a communal and religious atmosphere.

Connotatively, the procession symbolizes social unity, community participation, and continuity of tradition, presenting Ramadan as a collective cultural experience. The lanterns evoking nostalgia and celebration symbolize spiritual light that guides people both literally and metaphorically. The old street and the surrounding buildings suggest heritage and authenticity. Further, they anchor the scene to the Arab and Saudi culture. Children represent generational continuity and inclusion, while the Arabic blessing "تقبل الله صيامكم وقيامكم وصالح أعمالكم" boosts religiosity and shared Islamic identity. The hashtag #أعمالكم من صيامكم bridges tradition with modern social media engagement, showing that religious observance can coexist with contemporary digital culture.

From a semiotic and multimodal perspective, the ad uses religious temporality to frame Ramadan as a period of heightened spiritual and communal meaning. The spatial design, including the narrow street and close grouping of people carrying lanterns, creates intimacy and visually embeds community within a heritage context. Warm, muted colors convey comfort, nostalgia, and reverence, with the lantern lights acting as visual signifiers of guidance and spiritual warmth. The formal Arabic text aligns with respect for religious values while maintaining emotional warmth. Movement and gesture, such as walking together in a calm, orderly procession, communicate harmony, peace, and cohesion.

Persuasively, the ad appeals emotionally by emphasizing community, faith, tradition, and spiritual fulfillment. It uses a collectivist strategy, suggesting that participation in Ramadan rituals—and by implication, using Almarai products—is part of shared social values. Cultural embedding is evident through the combination of nostalgic streets, the Arabic blessing "تقبل الله صيامكم وقيامكم وصالح أعمالكم", and the ritualistic lantern procession, strengthening brand association with Saudi identity and heritage.

In summary, the ad layers semiotic elements to link Almarai with family and community cohesion, religious observance, and cultural authenticity. By blending modern branding with deeply rooted tradition, it delivers an emotional, communal, and culturally resonant message. This makes it a classic example of a Saudi Ramadan campaign, effectively merging nostalgia, faith, and social values into a single, visually compelling narrative.

4.2 Egyptian Advertisements

Egyptian digital advertisements usually use colloquial language and humor. The major purpose of these advertisements is to engage a large number of viewers. The Egyptian ads in general prioritize relatability and engagement. Visuals usually portray ordinary settings, familiar social interactions, and playful scenarios. This depiction aims at attracting attention and fostering audience connection. Linguistic strategies relied on Egyptian Arabic dialect. This linguistic choice generates an atmosphere of intimacy. The ad designers use humor and emotions to make the ads memorable. This approach reflected the local audience's preference for content that emphasizes familiarity rather than formal authority.



Figure 4. TV ad Snickers

The Snickers advertisement in figure (4) uses a variety of semiotic elements to communicate its message in a humorous and engaging way. Visually, the commercial presents characters who behave in exaggerated or unusual ways when they are hungry. These exaggerated actions function as signs that represent the negative effects of hunger. The setting typically shows an everyday social situation. It makes the scene familiar to the viewers. The Snickers bar is highlighted through close-up shots. It turns it into a visual symbol of satisfaction. There is a clear contrast between the chaotic behavior before eating the chocolate and the calm behavior afterward. This contrast highlights the idea that the product restores one's normal attitude.

Linguistically, the advertisement depends on colloquial Arabic language. It makes the message memorable to the viewers. The slogan "انت مش انت وانت جعان" ("You're not you when you're hungry") plays a central role in explaining the humorous transformation shown in the advertisement. This phrase sums up the story of the ad. The colloquial language generates a sense of familiarity between the product and the audience. Its simplicity also makes it easy for the viewers to remember. The simple language strengthens the persuasive power of the advertisement.

The commercial uses multiple modes to deliver its message. Characters' funny facial expressions and bold acting show one's mood while feeling hungry. Strategic close-ups of the Snickers bar and the exaggerated delight of those eating it do the heavy lifting of product appeal, pulling all these elements into a cohesive sensory experience that holds attention and drives the message home.

On a cultural level, the ad reflects a social situation that most viewers have experienced. It makes the ad more relatable. The reliance on humor and everyday speech fits the conventions of snack food advertising. Such a kind of advertisement usually depends on humor rather than hard selling. Overall, the advertisement persuades viewers through a clear problem–solution narrative. Hunger is presented as the cause of unusual or frustrating behavior, while the Snickers bar functions as the solution that restores normal identity and social harmony. Through the combination of visual humor, colloquial language, and symbolic imagery, the advertisement effectively communicates its message and strengthens the connection between the product, satisfaction, and enjoyable social moments.



Figure 5. Wadi Degla – "مين يادوب" (Ramadan 2026)

Wadi Degla launched its Ramadan 2026 commercial under the title "مين يادوب" starring actor Essam Omar, with Maged El Kedwany performing the accompanying song, in a campaign characterized by light comedy suited to the spirit of Ramadan. The ad achieved significant success immediately upon release, reaching approximately 4.4 million views on Instagram alone, in addition to thousands of

views across other platforms. The ad targets a real estate audience — specifically Egyptians in their early thirties — by wrapping a property purchase message inside a generationally resonant comic song, making it one of the more semiotically layered commercial texts to emerge from the 2026 Ramadan advertising season.

At the surface level, the ad presents a series of observable, literal signs. Actor Essam Omar appears across multiple everyday domestic scenes — a sofa, a gym, familiar Egyptian interiors — frequently looking caught off guard or mildly embarrassed. Over these scenes, Maged El Kedwany's voice intervenes in song form, narrating observations about the character's condition. The song lyrics catalogue recognizable physical and behavioral markers of turning thirty: a grey hair appearing after two days, enlarging phone font size, forgetting people's names mid-conversation, preferring the sofa over going out, cooking on days off, groaning after finishing a workout, and being called "عمو" by a child shorter than you. The Wadi Degla logo and tagline appear at the close, anchoring the entire narrative to the message of apartment ownership.

Beneath its comic surface, the ad operates on a far richer layer of cultural and symbolic meaning. The phrase "مين يادوب" is not a neutral question — in Egyptian social life, crossing thirty without property or marriage carries considerable weight, and the song both names and deflects that pressure simultaneously. Each lyrical detail functions as what semioticians would call an index: a sign that points beyond itself to something larger. Grey hair indexes biological aging, Fortaljim joint cream indexes physical decline, and enlarging the phone font indexes failing eyesight. Together they form a semiotic cluster communicating that the body has already begun its quiet reclassification of the viewer. The lyric "هيدمع لما نقوله عمو" captures a specific generational wound — the moment a child's innocent address moves you from "شاب" to "عمو," marking an irreversible crossing from one social category to another. Meanwhile, lines like "مين رجع يسمع كلام بابا وماما" and "مين بقى بيظقم في البيت البيجاما" connote a quieter, more settled maturity — a return to domestic rhythms that semiotically prepares the emotional ground for the product message: if you are already living like an adult, you should be owning your home.

The ad's linguistic choices are among its most precise semiotic instruments. It uses not merely colloquial Egyptian Arabic but a highly specific generational dialect, one that depends on the audience recognizing references to Ziad Zaza, Fortaljim, and Cool Tone as culturally datable markers. This specificity functions as a boundary sign, telling the audience that the song is addressed to them and no one else, creating an intimate contract between text and viewer. The choice of musical form over conventional dialogue is equally significant. A song repeats, circulates, and detaches from its advertising origin to travel as cultural content — meaning the persuasion is delivered in the register of entertainment, substantially lowering the viewer's psychological resistance to the commercial message. The ad relies on a satirical musical idea with a light spirit, which ensures the brand's proposition arrives wrapped in pleasure rather than pressure.

The casting reinforces this dynamic at every level. Essam Omar, whose role is largely reactive — caught, exposed, recognizable — positions the audience as the true subject of the song rather than a spectator of it. His body absorbs the comic embarrassment so that the viewer can laugh at themselves safely. Maged El Kedwany, singing without appearing centrally, functions as a narrator-sign: authoritative, familiar, and gently teasing. His established comic persona in Egyptian popular culture means his voice carries the cultural weight needed to deliver an uncomfortable truth — that you are aging and should plan accordingly — through warmth rather than confrontation.

The ad's persuasive architecture is carefully sequenced. It spends the vast majority of its duration building recognition and laughter rather than selling, so that by the time the brand appears, the viewer has already emotionally committed to the narrative. The product message arrives not as a commercial imposition but as a logical conclusion to a story the viewer feels belongs to them. Humor functions here as disarmament: the real anxieties around aging, marriage, and property in Egyptian culture are real and often acute, but comedy translates them into shared laughter, making the suggestion to act — to buy an apartment — feel like relief rather than obligation. The ad generated widespread engagement because its lyrics carried a spirit of wit toward that generation, describing situations in their lives that signal they have passed their thirties, which means Wadi Degla positions itself not merely as a real estate developer but as a brand that genuinely understands this generation's specific cultural moment.

The choice to launch during Ramadan adds a final layer of persuasive meaning. The holy month is, in Egyptian cultural life, a season of reflection, family gathering, and consequential decisions. Framing the question of apartment ownership within Ramadan subtly infuses the message with moral and communal urgency — this is the time of year when one takes stock and acts. In this way, the ad does not simply sell a product. It constructs consumption as a culturally appropriate, generationally overdue act of growing up, performed in the company of one's peers and anchored in the shared rhythms of Egyptian life.

4.3 Cross-Cultural Comparison

When comparing the two national settings, both Saudi and Egyptian commercials showed that they carefully matched semiotic resources with audience expectations. However, the techniques were carried out in quite different ways. Saudi ads were more formal and focused on national symbols and community identification. They used religious temporality, traditional visual codes, and semi-formal Arabic to make emotional pleas based on shared faith, family ties, and cultural history. Egyptian ads, on the other hand, used normal language, comedy, and everyday life to make their audiences feel close to them. They did this by using humorous exaggeration, generational irony, and scenarios that people could relate to. Saudi ads tend to make the viewer's experience more formal and important by putting the brand in the sacred rhythms of Ramadan or the dignity of national tradition. Egyptian ads, on the other hand, tend to meet the viewer at eye level and show their daily struggles, bodily anxieties, and social pressures back to them through humor (See Table 2).

Even though the tone and register were different in each case, they both relied on multimodal integration, which means using text, images, color, and layout as persuasive tools that work together instead of relying on just one channel. The notion of multimodality remained

constant; but, the cultural codes engaged within it shifted. Saudi ads used warm green and gold colors, round family groups, and Arabic greetings that showed religious unity. Egyptian ads, on the other hand, used everyday songs, humorous casting, and culturally relevant references to create a sense of belonging to a certain generation. In both situations, the semiotic choices were not just for show; they were purposeful. Each aspect helped to ground the brand in a cultural environment that was both recognized and emotionally important.

Table 2. Comparative Semiotic Features: Saudi vs. Egyptian Advertisements

Semiotic Feature	Saudi Advertisements	Egyptian Advertisements
Language register	Semi-formal / formal Arabic	Colloquial Egyptian dialect
Dominant persuasive appeal	National pride, faith, tradition	Humor, relatability, social familiarity
Visual symbols	Flag, traditional dress, lanterns, skyline	Everyday interiors, physical comedy, product close-ups
Color palette	Green, gold, warm muted tones	Naturalistic, everyday settings
Cultural frame	Religion, national identity, heritage	Generational experience, social anxiety
Multimodal emphasis	Spatial design, symbolic layout	Musical form, comic casting, linguistic specificity
Audience positioning	Elevated within collective values	Met at eye level through shared experience
Temporal frame	National Day, Ramadan (sacred time)	Ramadan (social and reflective time)

The results indicate that while overarching persuasive objectives, such as trustworthiness, emotional resonance, and audience involvement, are generally consistent across the two contexts, the cultural framing and semiotic implementation differ in ways that embody unique societal values and communicative conventions. Saudi advertising conveys trust and attractiveness via tradition, religious identity, and national pride, while Egyptian advertising attains similar objectives through humor, social familiarity, and the candid recognition of quotidian experiences. The two contexts together show that persuasive effectiveness in digital commercial discourse is not a one-size-fits-all formula, but a practice that depends on the culture and requires both semiotic awareness and a deep understanding of the specific symbolic resources that an audience brings to the act of viewing (See Table 3)

Table 3. Persuasive Strategies Across Both Contexts

Persuasive Strategy	Saudi Context	Egyptian Context
Emotional appeal	Faith, collective pride, nostalgia	Humor, generational recognition, shared anxiety
Credibility markers	National symbols, formal register, brand authority	Cultural familiarity, celebrity casting, colloquial intimacy
Cultural alignment	Religious and national identity	Everyday social life and generational experience
Identity construction	Collective / national self	Generational / social self
Product integration	Brand as national participant	Brand as logical conclusion of emotional narrative

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital advertisements in Saudi Arabia and Egypt are complex semiotic structures in which language, images, and cultural symbols collectively produce persuasive meaning. The ads that were looked at don't just work as simple ads. Instead, they function as culturally ingrained texts that illustrate and reinforce the distinct societal values, communication conventions, and audience expectations inherent to each culture. These findings corroborate Barthes' (1977) claim that visual representations in media communicate ideological significances that reinforce cultural norms, and Williamson's (1978) argument that advertisements link products to culturally relevant symbols to transform consumption into a means of achieving social or personal objectives.

The research indicated a continual reliance on national symbols, religious temporality, and formal semiotic registers to construct emotive appeals based on collective identity and cultural pride within the setting of Saudi Arabia. In the three ads we looked at, the Saudi flag, traditional clothing, Ramadan processions, and Arabic blessings were not just pretty things; they were also politically charged signs that reminded people of their common history and community. Al-Azzam and Al-Khalil (2014) observed that Arab commercials commonly use cultural symbols like traditional clothes, family settings, and religious references to enhance social values and develop trust with the audience. This pattern fits with that. It also supports what Albogami et al. (2025) claimed about how Saudi commercial discourse uses national symbols to represent societal values and identity. Ryding (2005) called the strategic use of linguistic variation in advertising, where varied levels of language convey not just brand authority but also cultural respect and authenticity. The use of semi-formal Arabic along with localized idioms is another example of this.

The Egyptian ads, on the other hand, had a quite different meaning. They employed normal language, funny exaggeration, and the textures of ordinary life. Ryding (2005) says that dialectal Arabic is widely utilized in corporate settings to make people feel like they know each other. The Snickers and Wadi Degla advertising both used Egyptian Arabic dialect as a key technique to connect with their viewers and make them feel like they knew them. The fact that both ads employ humor to persuade people supports De Mooij's (2019) thesis that localization is an important feature of advertising persuasion. The success of both advertisements hinged on the viewers' comprehension of cultural references, age indicators, and societal fears embedded within words. The Wadi Degla advertisement demonstrates the stratification of semiotic resources to

transform a straightforward real estate message into a culturally significant narrative spanning generations, exemplifying Cook's (2001) claim about the capacity of advertising discourse to produce meaning that surpasses its explicit commercial purpose.

In both countries, it was clear that digital ads needed to use more than one mode of communication to be interesting. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) assert that the analyzed advertisements employed a coordinated interaction of text, images, colors, typography, and spatial design, rather than relying on a singular semiotic paradigm. But the cultural rules that were used in these multimodal systems were extremely different in the two cases. Saudi commercials employed warm green and gold colors, round family groups, and traditional settings to convey how proud they were of their country and how united they were in their faith. On the other side, Egyptian advertising combined musical form, reactive casting, and culturally relevant language references to make people feel close to each other across generations. This conclusion supports the claim made by Rodgers and Thorson (2017) that the effectiveness of digital multimodal messaging depends on the seamless integration of modes and their conformity to viewers' cultural expectations, rather than the use of a universally effective combination of semiotic resources.

The cross-cultural comparison indicates that the primary persuasive objectives of credibility, emotional appeal, and audience engagement are analogous in both national contexts. However, the semiotic tactics employed to achieve these objectives reflect divergent social ideals and modes of communication. This study corresponds with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension framework, since both Saudi and Egyptian advertising exhibit collectivist characteristics that emphasize family, societal cohesion, and collective identity, while contrasting in the specific symbolic representations employed to express collectivism. Saudi advertising showed solidarity by putting the brand in the holy rhythms of Ramadan or the dignity of national culture. They did this by using formal, lofty language. Egyptian advertising, on the other hand, showed collectivism by making people laugh at their own generational experiences through shared humor and social familiarity. This difference supports De Mooij's (2019) claim that people understand ads via their cultural lenses, making cultural adaptation not just a matter of style, but also an important aspect in how well ads function.

The findings indicate that effective persuasion in digital commercial discourse is not a universal strategy, but a semiotic practice that differs between cultures. Advertisers that understand semiotics, or what symbolic resources an audience brings to the act of viewing, can develop messages that are not just informative but also culturally relevant and emotionally important. These findings have profound implications for language acquisition and intercultural communication training, as the analyzed advertisements exemplify intricate multimodal texts that facilitate learners in developing a critical comprehension of the construction of meaning, identity, and persuasion within various cultural contexts. This corresponds with the growing academic support for the integration of genuine multimodal resources in the cultivation of communicative ability (Ibrahim, 2022; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Qasim & Noor, 2024; Rudrakumar & Venkatraman, 2022; Starr et al., 2022).

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how persuasive strategies are constructed in digital commercial discourse in Saudi Arabia and Egypt through the use of signs, symbols, and multimodal elements, and to explore how culturally embedded semiotic resources reflect the social values, norms, and audience expectations specific to each national context. Through a qualitative comparative semiotic analysis of six digital advertisements, the study has demonstrated that advertising in both contexts operates as a culturally situated meaning-making practice in which linguistic choices, visual design, color, layout, and symbolic references work together to produce persuasive messages that extend well beyond their explicit commercial propositions.

The analysis revealed that Saudi Arabian advertisements consistently draw on national symbols, religious temporality, and formal semiotic registers to construct emotional appeals rooted in collective identity, cultural heritage, and shared faith. Egyptian advertisements, by contrast, rely on colloquial language, humor, and socially recognizable everyday scenes to build relatability and emotional intimacy with their audiences. Despite these differences in tone, register, and symbolic orientation, both national contexts confirmed the centrality of multimodal integration to persuasive effectiveness, with each advertisement deploying text, image, color, and spatial design as interlocking instruments rather than independent channels. The study therefore affirms that while overarching persuasive goals such as credibility, emotional appeal, and audience engagement are broadly shared across the two contexts, the cultural framing and semiotic execution through which these goals are pursued reflect meaningfully distinct social values and communicative norms.

These findings contribute to the growing body of scholarship on semiotic and multimodal analysis in Arab advertising discourse by offering a systematic cross-cultural comparison that moves beyond single-country case studies. By demonstrating that countries sharing broadly similar cultural and religious backgrounds can nonetheless produce markedly different persuasive strategies and semiotic orientations, the study underscores the importance of treating Arab advertising as an internally diverse field rather than a homogeneous category. The findings also confirm that cultural adaptation is not merely a stylistic consideration in advertising design but a fundamental determinant of persuasive effectiveness, as the success of each analyzed advertisement depended on its audience's ability to decode culturally specific symbols, linguistic registers, and social references embedded within the text.

The study is not without limitations. The dataset was purposively selected and relatively small, which means the findings are interpretive and context-specific rather than statistically generalizable. The analysis was also limited to static digital advertisements and short video commercials, excluding other forms of digital commercial content such as influencer marketing, interactive campaigns, and sponsored content, which represent increasingly significant dimensions of contemporary digital advertising in both national contexts. Future research would benefit from expanding the dataset to include a broader range of product categories, platforms, and advertisement formats, as well as from

incorporating audience reception studies to examine how real viewers decode and respond to the semiotic strategies identified in this analysis. Finally, the study highlights the value of integrating authentic multimodal advertisements into language acquisition and intercultural communication training. The analyzed advertisements demonstrate how meaning, identity, and persuasion are constructed through the strategic orchestration of semiotic resources, making them productive pedagogical materials for developing learners' critical multimodal literacy and cross-cultural communicative competence. As digital advertising continues to expand across the Arab world and beyond, semiotic awareness — the capacity to read, interpret, and critically evaluate the symbolic resources through which commercial messages are constructed — becomes an increasingly essential skill for both researchers and language learners alike.

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Author contributions

Mohammad Awad Al-Dawoody Abdulaal, Abdullah Atef Abdullah Ibrahim, and Shadiya Al-Hashmi were responsible for the conception and design of the study. Abdullah Atef Abdullah Ibrahim and Shadiya Al-Hashmi contributed to data collection and data analysis. Ahmad Abdel Tawwab Sharaf Eldin and Amal Zakaria Mahmoud Hal participated in interpreting the findings and critically revising the manuscript for important intellectual content. Mohammad Awad Al-Dawoody Abdulaal drafted the manuscript, and all authors contributed to revising and approving the final version of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. No special agreements concerning authorship apply to this study.

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