



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Social Media Posts for Sports Festivals in Private Sector Colleges

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a multimodal analysis of social media posts for sports festivals in private sector colleges, with a particular focus on the interplay between various modes of communication—visual, aural, linguistic, gestural, and spatial. Drawing on the framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), this research seeks to understand how these multimodal resources combine to construct meaning within sports event promotions. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive approach, data were collected from social media platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram. The sample comprises four promotional posters: two sourced from Facebook and two from Instagram. Through this analysis, the study examines how visual, textual, and symbolic elements in banners and posters communicate key messages and evoke emotional engagement among the target audience. The findings confirm the importance of multimodal strategies in enhancing the appeal and promotional impact of sports festivals, highlighting the potential for well-crafted multimodal materials to generate excitement and participation.

Keywords: multimodality, multimodal analysis, social media, festivals, sports, private colleges

Introduction

Communication is a two-way process in which modes and modalities play significant roles. A mode refers to the manner through which the analysis and evaluation of meaning are expressed from an individual's particular point of view. According to O'Toole (1994), a mode can be understood as the medium in which communication takes place. Modality, on the other hand, reflects the speaker's and listener's perspectives on the uttered words based on their specific knowledge, shaping how they assess the truth of what is communicated. Bybee et al. (1994) define modality as a semantic category that conveys the speaker's or writer's attitude towards the world. It functions linguistically to express relationships to reality or truth conditions, such as possibility, probability, permission, volition, obligation, and necessity. A mode is essentially a method employed for creating meaning or conveying messages, often manifested across various cultural or societal



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

contexts and from diverse viewpoints, including sensory perspectives.

Rutledge (2018) describes multi-modality as a mode of representation, communication, and interaction that employs multiple modes or semiotic resources—such as images, sounds, and gestures—to construct meaning. Multimodality is defined as using multiple modes of communication to convey meaning. According to Jewitt (2009), when multiple modes are combined to form one artefact, each individual mode adds meaning and potential to the whole. Multi-modality refers to the use of different resources such as images, sounds and graphics that are used to create meaning in all kinds of aspects. In today's world multimodality plays a significant role in how meaning is conveyed and interpreted by individual perspectives (Bezemer & Jewett, 2010).

Language is a medium in which emotions, thoughts and feelings can be shared. For a better way of communication, we need to know about the steps of these, which are verbal, spatial, tactile, auditory and visual. Not only these, but also there are some hidden aspects and modes of communication. These modes of communication are extensively used in the analysis of academic social media posts for various events conducted in the institutions. Rutledge (2018) defines multimodality as a way of representing, communicating, and interacting that uses a variety of modes, or resources, to create meaning. This includes modes like images, sound, gestures, and space. Modes of communication include:

Verbal: Interact with others through writing or speaking.

Tactile: It is a form of non-verbal communication in which the communication occurs by touching.

Visual: It is a form of non-verbal communication in which the ideas are conveyed through charts, graphs, pictures, etc.

Auditory: By listening through different sources.

Spatial: Things are arranged to convey meaning.

Each mode contributes to the communication in modality of how individuals interpret the meaning by using these modes. Multimodality helps the researchers to analyze these elements and make it easy to understand the complex communication more effectively.

Private sector institutes use highly eye-catching social media posts and advertisements to promote their events, such as annual admission campaigns, annual sports, and annual debate competitions. Moreover, these festivals are very significant, as they show the cultural norms of an institution. Specifically speaking, sports festivals allow the people to understand and appreciate the cultural values of the institutions. They also promote the name of the institute. The social media posts for such events evoke nostalgic memories even after the decades have passed. The study explores the use of various communication methods in social media posts promoting sports festivals in private colleges, aiming to effectively share important messages and generate excitement.

Research Objectives

To examine the interplay of different types of communication (like pictures, colours, and words) in social media posts promoting sports festivals in private colleges.

To find out how these combined communication methods help share important messages and make people interested and excited about the sports events.

Literature Review

Multi-modality is understood as a phenomenon rather than a theoretical concept (van Leeuwen, 2015). Essentially, all forms of discourse are considered multimodal. For example, spoken discourse involves the integration of language, intonation, vocal quality,



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

gestures, facial expressions, and posture, along with elements of self-presentation such as clothing and hairstyle. In contrast, written discourse combines language with typographic features, illustrations, layout, and color (ibid). This detailed examination stems from the belief that analyzing the various semiotic modes present in a piece of discourse and their interactions can reveal different ideologies and underlying beliefs (van Leeuwen, 2015). As a result, several frameworks have been created to analyze the multimodality of various discourse types. Among these is the Visual Grammar framework, developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in 1996 and updated in 2006, which has been used in the present study.

Numerous researchers have contributed to the understanding of multimodality. According to van Leeuwen (2005), multimodality involves the integration of various semiotic modes, such as language and music, within a communicative artefact or event. Baldry and Thibault (2006) define multimodality as the various ways in which different semiotic resource systems are simultaneously utilized and contextualized to create meaning specific to a text. Regardless of the emphasis in each definition, it is generally accepted that multimodality can encompass a single sensory experience represented through multiple semiotics or multiple sensory experiences with various semiotics. Consequently, multimodal discourse refers to communication achieved through different senses—such as visual, tactile, and auditory—utilizing resources like language, images, sounds, actions, and other semiotic elements.

As the theory of Multi modal Discourse Analysis (MDA) matures, more scholars are applying it in practical ways. First, they use MDA in static multimodal discourses, which include poetry, advertisements, movie posters, magazine covers, websites, and similar items. Second, they apply it in dynamic multi-modal discourses, such as PowerPoint, television shows, films, and videos. Third, MDA is utilized in teaching foreign languages. In static discourses, the key strategy to attract consumers is to find a careful balance between engaging them and keeping a distance through multimodal design. In dynamic discourses, using different modes helps shape the image of a city, with promotional films serving as a prime example. In the past, promotional films often focused on political messages, but over time, they have evolved to serve multiple purposes, appearing in forms like tourism promotions, scientific videos, and educational materials. Additionally, many studies have explored promotional films from various angles, such as how they communicate and how they create meaning. However, there are few studies that examine promotional films through the lens of multi-modality discourse analysis, which opens up opportunities for our research.

To examine the different styles of political posters used by the Fianna Fáil party during their Irish campaign, Lirola (2016) conducted a multi-modal discourse analysis of several posters from Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger period. This analysis focused on the changes seen in posters created during the Celtic Tiger years (1997 to 2008) compared to those made after it (2009 to 2012). Specifically, four posters were analysed, each released during different elections in 1997, 2002, 2007, and 2011. The goal was to explore the similarities and differences among these posters and how they portrayed the party leaders. Understanding these portrayals is crucial, as they reveal how designers mix words and images to shape perceptions of the party or candidate's power, which in turn influences voters' decisions. Additionally, the data analysis was framed within Critical Discourse Analysis to highlight the persuasive techniques used in the posters being examined.

The Social Actor theory created by van Leeuwen (2008) and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (2006) were used to look at the visual aspects of the posters. This helped to understand how different people are shown and represented. The study's results highlight the favourable portrayal of leaders and politicians, focusing on their status and



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

formality. These elements are important because they help to emphasise the strength and possibilities of a particular party, which can influence the audience's voting decisions. Looking at it another way, Al-Masai (2016) took a multimodal approach to study the Jordanian cartoon editorials created by Emad Hajjaj. She used this method to discover the various messages in the cartoons she examined. In total, she looked at 300 cartoons. Her analysis was based on van Dijk's (2008) theory of context models. In this study, the researcher looked at both the spoken and unspoken elements in editorial cartoons. They focused on three important types of contexts that help us understand what the cartoons are saying. These are the macro context, micro context, and dynamic context. The study's findings show that Emad Hajjaj uses a mix of words, images, and social culture to convey various messages in his cartoons, highlighting important social issues.

Similarly, Hu and Luo (2016) carried out a multimodal discourse analysis of the Tmall Double Eleven shopping festival advertisement. They used Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar framework (1996), which helps analyze the visual aspects of communication. Their main goal was to show how various semiotic resources in advertisements can attract and persuade viewers. The findings revealed that the way representational, interactive, and compositional meanings work together is important in convincing the audience and explaining their actions. The study also uncovered the different strategies that advertisement creators use to control and influence viewers psychologically.

Another example of a multimodal study in media is the one by Tan et al. (2018), which explored how violent extremist images are reshaped in online media. This research aimed to highlight the types of images used and created by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) that are often reused in other online platforms. The study also looks into the different situations where these images are reused and whether these situations are formal or informal. It focuses on how these images appear on various media platforms like news websites and blogs. To achieve this, the researchers used a mixed-methods approach that included several data analysis techniques. These techniques are multimodal discourse analysis, data mining, and information visualization. It is important to note that the study builds on previous research that examined how images from ISIS magazines, like Dabiq and Rumiya, are reused. The results show that some images do change their context when reused. Regarding where these images are found, the study found that they mostly appear on Western news and political websites, primarily in formal settings.

Ahmed et al. (2024) analyzed the shop signs in Pakistani context. The researchers analyzed the photos of shop signs, located in Lahore Pakistan, by using analytical framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The researchers also interviewed shopkeepers (n=20) to glean the reasons of using English and Urdu languages on shops signs. The data suggested that the majority of the shop owners used English language on their signs for the purposes of convenience, uniqueness and prestige. Besides Naeem et al (2023) analyzed self-representation of private sector universities in Lahore through captioned Facebook wall posts. The study was conducted under the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (2005), Multimodal analysis (2007), and Self-representation in social media (2017). The data reflected that universities use different multimodal features to represent their identities in the social media platforms. The universities employ discursive strategies to shape their identities on social media platforms.

Many studies have been conducted on the management and organization of sports festivals; there is a lack of research that explores the multimodal aspects of these events by covering them in the form of semiotic analysis using communication mode, especially in the context of private sector colleges, which shows culture in education.



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

Theoretical Framework

Multi-modality refers to the use of more than one mode of communication in a text to create meaning. Although communication has always been multimodal, multimodality in discourse analysis is a relatively recent approach; linguists began to consider a multimodal approach around the 1960s. Subsequently, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) contributed to the study of multimodality and were well known for writing books on the topic that were instrumental to the understanding and development of multimodal analysis. Because of this, their work set the foundation for the study of multimodality and influenced the works of future linguists.

When we look at the multimodality, we consider two terms:

1. Mode
2. Medium

Modes

Modes refer to the different ways that we can create meaning. Gunther Kress defines a mode as a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, and moving images are examples of different modes. People communicate in different ways, so it is important to be aware of the different modes used in communication to fully understand the meanings that are being conveyed. These can be broken down into five categories:

Linguistic mode

The linguistic mode focuses on the meaning of written or spoken language in communication. For example, this includes choice of words, vocabulary, grammar, structure, etc.

Visual mode

The visual mode focuses on the meaning of what can be seen by a viewer. This includes images, symbols, videos, signs, etc. It also includes aspects of visual design, such as colour, layout, font type and size, etc.

Aural mode

The aural mode focuses on the meaning of what can be heard by a listener. This includes sound effects, music, and voice. This can be realized through tone, pitch, speed, volume, rhythm, etc.

Gestural mode

The gestural mode focuses on the meaning of communication through movement. This includes facial expressions, gestures, body language, and interactions between people. These are all examples of non-verbal communication, as meaning is conveyed without the use of speech.

Spatial mode

The spatial mode focuses on the meaning of communication through physical layout. This includes position, spacing, the distance between elements in a text, proximity between people/objects, etc.

Medium:

The material or technological platform that facilitates communication is referred to as a



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

medium. Digital, physical, or a mix of both can be used as a medium. For example, print media (books, newspapers, etc.) digital media (websites, social media platforms, online advertisements and videos), etc.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method for a thorough examination of communication methods. It involves descriptive analysis. The study chooses the qualitative method (collected non-numerical data) to scrutinize the data through purposive sampling technique. Given that qualitative research design is widely used for examining and comprehending meaning (Nick Jain, 2023), the primary goal of selecting this research approach is to investigate how text and image collaborate to produce meaning. This framework is best suited for understanding the complex interplay between different modes of communication, like visual, textual and symbolic elements, in conveying the meaning through sports festivals in the private sector colleges. Data are gathered from social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. This study consisted of 4 posters, with 2 sourced from Facebook and 2 from Instagram (between 2022 to 2025).

Data Analysis

The analysis focused on identifying and categorizing the communication methods such as text, visuals, gestures, and speech, examining how they interact, and interpreting how effective they are during the academic festival in the private sector. This involved coding themes from interviews, transcribing spoken and unspoken interactions, and analysing the visuals along with written and spatial designs.

Figure 1: Poster from Punjab Group of Colleges



Visual Modality

Textual Elements: The poster prominently displays text such as “Girls Sports Gala-2022” and “Register Now”, using bold and colourful fonts to grab attention. Important dates like “19th March 2022” and “Deadline to Apply: 14th March 2022” are highlighted in red, emphasising urgency.

Graphics and Symbols: Sports icons, such as a football, basketball, and running figures, signify the theme of the event. The use of bright colours (e.g., rainbow-coloured “sports”) enhances visual appeal.

Logo Placement: The Punjab College Raiwind Cultural Society (PCRCS) logo at the top gives credibility and context.

Spatial Modality

Layout and Organisation: The information is hierarchically arranged, with the event name at the centre and supporting details below. The use of spacing helps dividing the poster into segments (event details, application deadline, venue, and notes).



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

Auditory Modality

There is no explicit auditory component in this image. However, elements like “Let’s Challenge the Champions” evoke enthusiasm, indirectly suggesting competitive cheering and energetic auditory engagement during the event.

Linguistic Modality

Tone and Style: The language is motivational and direct, appealing to students’ competitive spirit. Words like “challenge” and “champions” imply a sense of achievement and encouragement.

Clarity: Dates, deadlines, and venue details are clearly provided, ensuring accessibility.

Gesture Modality

Implied gestures through stylized figures (e.g., running and playing) symbolize movement and athletic activity.

Sports Figures: Stylized figures show gestures of running and playing, symbolizing energy and movement.

Implied Interaction: The phrase “Let’s Challenge the Champions” evokes gestures of encouragement and competition.

This combination of modalities ensures the poster is engaging, informative and action-oriented.

Figure 2: Poster from Superior College



Visual Modality

Graphics: The image prominently features various sports equipment (e.g., balls, rackets, shuttlecocks, bats), visually reinforcing the theme of a sports gala. The stylized running figure at the top suggests motion and energy.

Colour: A combination of calm (green, white) and energetic (orange, red) colours conveys excitement while maintaining clarity.

Spatial Modality

Layout and Organization: Key information (event name and location) is placed centrally and is easy to identify. The arrangement of sports items at the bottom visually anchors the image and balances the layout.

Proximity and Alignment: The text and graphics are aligned logically, with the slogan and contact details strategically positioned for readability.



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

Auditory Modality

There are no explicit auditory elements. However, the question “Superiors, are you ready?” evokes an imagined response of excitement, cheers, and competitive enthusiasm.

Gesture Modality

Implied Gestures: The running figure at the top symbolises movement, athleticism, and active participation. The depicted sports gear implies gestures of playing and physical engagement.

Linguistic Modality

Textual Elements: The slogan “Superiors, are you ready?” is motivational and directly addresses the audience. The use of bold text for key phrases ensures the message is clear and engaging.

Clarity: The event details (campus name, contact number, and location) are concise and easy to locate.

It encourages excitement and participation through its organised design and motivational messaging.

Figure 3: Poster from Nisa Colleges



Visual Modality

Graphics: Silhouettes of a runner and a cricket player symbolize physical activity and sports. The bold red “X” in the background emphasizes energy, action, and focus.

Colours: Red dominates the visual space, representing passion and excitement, while white provides contrast for clarity.

Icons: The list of activities is marked with bullet points, ensuring a clean and organized visual presentation.

Spatial Modality

Layout and Design: The design is well-structured with the event name “Sports Festival 2022” in large, bold text for prominence. Supporting details (event slogan and list of activities) are grouped at the bottom for easy readability.

Hierarchy: The most important elements (event name and visuals) are placed centrally, while secondary details (activities and slogan) are positioned below.



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

Auditory Modality

No explicit auditory elements are present. However, phrases like “United we play, united we win” evoke imagined chants and cheering, typical in sports events.

Gesture Modality

Implied Gestures: The running silhouette conveys speed and determination. The cricket player’s batting pose suggests active participation and competitiveness. These gestures reflect energy, teamwork, and enthusiasm.

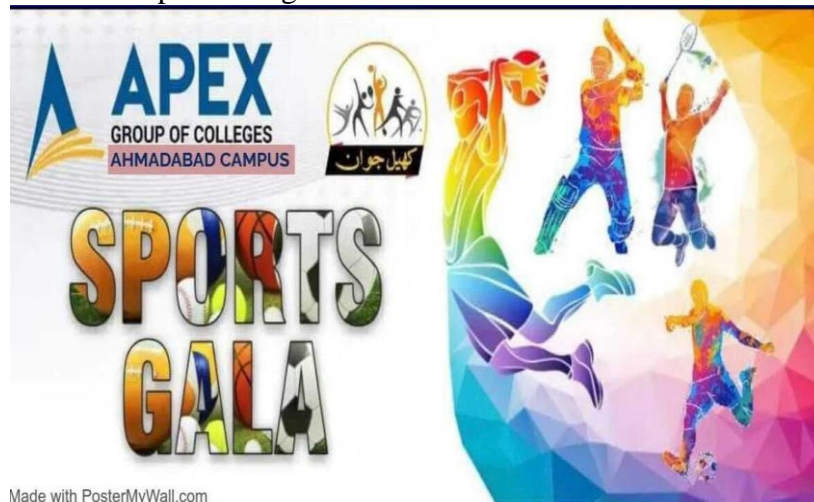
Linguistic Modality

Text: The slogan “United we play, united we win” emphasizes teamwork and unity. The activities list (e.g., cricket, musical chairs, eating competition) highlights the diversity and inclusiveness of the event.

Clarity: Short, impactful phrases and clear fonts make the information accessible and easy to read.

It emphasizes teamwork, diversity and action while maintaining a clean and dynamic design.

Figure 4: Poster from Apex Colleges



Linguistic Modality

The linguistic mode focuses on the meaning of written or spoken language in communication. While this poster indicates “Sports Gala” is the central focus and is written in large, bold, multicolored text. The font style and size immediately grab attention and signify the theme of sports. “Apex Group of Colleges Ahmadabad Campus” serves as the institutional identity and ensures the audience knows the organizer. The use of bilingual text (English and Urdu) reflects a linguistic mode, catering to a diverse audience and enhancing inclusivity.

Visual Elements

The visual mode focuses on the meaning of what can be seen by a viewer. This includes images, symbols, videos, signs, etc. It also includes aspects of visual design, such as colour, layout, font type and size, etc.

While this poster indicates Vibrant silhouettes of individuals engaging in various sports (e.g., cricket, basketball, football, badminton) represent diversity in sports and inclusivity. The use of rainbow-like colours adds energy, dynamism, and vibrancy to the visual narrative.



Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

Auditory Modality

The aural mode focuses on the meaning of what can be heard by a listener. This includes sound effects, music, and voice. This can be realized through tone, pitch, speed, volume, rhythm, etc., while this poster lacks any auditory aspect, as it is a static image. To incorporate an auditory modality, additional elements like sound effects, voiceovers, or music in a digital version of this advertisement (e.g., a video or interactive graphic) would be required.

Spatial Modality

The spatial mode focuses on the meaning of communication through physical layout. This includes position, spacing, the distance between elements in a text, proximity between people/objects, etc., while the poster shows that the elements are arranged to guide the viewer's attention from the institutional name on the left to the event theme and colourful illustrations on the right. The clear separation of text, logos, and visuals prevents clutter, ensuring a smooth visual flow. Larger text for the event name ("Sports Gala") emphasizes its importance, while smaller text provides supporting information.

Gestural Modality

The gestural mode focuses on the meaning of communication through movement. This includes facial expressions, gestures, body language, and interactions between people. While this poster shows that the dynamic body of the sports figures suggests action, energy, and movement, creating an implied gesture that aligns with the sports theme. It effectively communicates the purpose of the event while appealing to the target audience.

Conclusion

These posters effectively use multi modal elements (visual, spatial, linguistic, auditory-implied, and gesture) to promote excitement and engagement for sports events. Visuals like sports equipment, bold text, and vibrant colours highlight energy and teamwork, while spatial layouts prioritize key information for clarity. Linguistic elements such as motivational phrases ("United we play, united we win") evoke enthusiasm, and implied gestures (running, playing) symbolize action and participation. The designs reflect inclusive and empowerment, especially for women, while fostering unity and community spirit. Overall, they successfully communicate their purpose and inspire active involvement.

Implication

A multimodal analysis of sport festivals explores how various communication modes—visuals, sounds, gestures, and language—interact to create meaning. It helps in understanding cultural representation, audience engagement, media influence, and commercialization. This approach also reveals power dynamics, such as gender and political narratives, while assessing inclusivity through accessibility measures. Overall, it provides a comprehensive view of how sport festivals function as cultural and ideological events.

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Vol. 3 No. 8 (August) (2025)

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