

**Multimodal Constructions of Togetherness and Women in Portuguese and Moroccan
McDonald's Advertisements**

**Construções Multimodais da União e da Mulher em Anúncios Portugueses e
Marroquinos do McDonald's**

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how a global fast-food brand presents togetherness and depicts women in Portugal and Morocco, using a visual-led, MDA. It looks at how social relations and gender roles are shaped through visual design and language. Using social semiotics, CDA, and FCDA, the findings show that togetherness acts as a relational script. Meanwhile, women are portrayed with varying levels of agency, legitimacy, and voice authority, not just visibility. Spoken and on-screen language also help guide how gender and belonging are understood.

KEYWORDS: MDA; Women; togetherness; social semiotics; McDonald's

RESUMO: Este estudo examina como uma marca global de fast food constrói a união e representa as mulheres em Portugal e em Marrocos, recorrendo a uma Análise do Discurso Multimodal orientada para o visual (MDA). Analisa-se de que forma as relações sociais e os papéis de género são moldados através do design visual e da linguagem. Com base na semiótica social, na Análise Crítica do Discurso Multimodal (CDA) e na Análise Crítica Feminista do Discurso (FCDA), os resultados mostram que a união funciona como um guião relacional. Paralelamente, as mulheres são retratadas com diferentes níveis de agência, legitimidade e autoridade de voz, e não apenas em termos de visibilidade. A linguagem oral e a linguagem apresentada no ecrã contribuem igualmente para orientar a compreensão do género e do sentimento de pertença.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: MDA; mulheres; união; semiótica social; McDonald's

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Introduction

Advertising is a culturally dense communicative form; it compresses social values, role expectations, and relational norms into short audiovisual narratives that are immediately legible to local audiences. In multinational brand communication, this makes advertising a key site where localization is not limited to translation but involves semiotic calibration, how belonging is staged, whose presence is centered, whose voice carries authority, and what kinds of togetherness are presented as desirable or usual. From a multimodal perspective, such meanings are not carried by language alone; they emerge through coordinated choices across images, speech, sound, composition, and interactional staging (O'Halloran, 2008; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Cross-cultural advertising research has repeatedly shown that persuasive appeals and value cues tend to vary across markets in patterned ways. At the same time, the use of culture models requires methodological caution. Cultural dimensions can help researchers identify interpretive questions, but they should not be treated as deterministic predictors of specific textual outcomes (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). In this study, culture frameworks are therefore used as sensitizing heuristics to guide comparison while remaining attentive to past change and internal diversity (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Communication theory similarly suggests that Hall's High/Low context differences shape how messages manage explicitness versus implication, what is stated directly versus what is conveyed using shared assumptions and relational cues (Hall, 1976).

Given this context, the present paper examines McDonald's advertising videos in Portugal and Morocco as culturally situated multimodal texts that shape social meanings through recurring semiotic patterning. The comparison is designed to remain corpus-grounded rather than essentializing the two contexts as opposites. Advertisements are seen as sites where relational norms and gender ideologies are negotiated through the interaction of visual design and language (Ledin & Machin, 2018; Rose, 2016).

The analysis focuses on two primary constructs: togetherness and the portrayal of women. Togetherness is not just a general theme but is seen as a set of social scripts. This means looking at how ads convey belonging through group formations, closeness, shared looks, coordinated actions, eating together, and the feelings or values associated with social life (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007; Kalliny et al., 2011). This approach moves beyond just counting group scenes to explaining how being with others is made meaningful and convincing through different modes.

Women's portrayal is examined through their visibility, agency, and interactions with others, focusing on who gets to speak, who has authority, who takes initiative, and what roles women play (Lazar, 2007; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2018). Research shows that stereotypes often

remain, even as society changes, and these patterns vary by context and media (Gilly, 1988; Eisend, 2010; Matthes et al., 2016). Many studies use role labels and settings, but these do not fully show how agency and authority are built through camera work, framing, and editing. This is why a multimodal approach is needed to examine how women's importance and authority are created, rather than assumed from their presence (Ledin & Machin, 2018; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Methodologically, this paper employs a visual-led, multimodal discourse-analytic approach. Social semiotics offers a principled descriptive vocabulary for representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), while multimodal discourse analysis emphasizes how semiotic resources co-pattern across modes in audiovisual texts (O'Halloran, 2008). Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) extends this framework by linking recurring design patterns to ideological effects and the stabilization of normative meanings (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2018). Given the centrality of gender as an analytic domain, interpretation is further informed by Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which highlights how discourse naturalizes unequal distributions of speaking rights, authority, and moral evaluation (Lazar, 2007).

Empirically, the study examines a corpus of 20 publicly available video advertisements posted on the official McDonald's YouTube channels for Portugal and Morocco (10 per context), covering uploads from May 2022 to January 2026. The research design is comparative and qualitative, employing segmentation and multimodal transcription to document time-stamped scenes and the semiotic resources through which meaning is constructed (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). Cultural frameworks (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001) are applied heuristically to inform interpretation rather than to predict outcomes, and interpretive claims are grounded in explicit unitization, code definitions, and auditability principles consistent with qualitative rigor (Tracy, 2010; Elo et al., 2014). The present paper is guided by three research questions:

RQ1. How is togetherness constructed in McDonald's Portugal and McDonald's Morocco advertisements through visual and multimodal resources?

RQ2. How are women constructed in McDonald's Portugal and McDonald's Morocco advertisements through visual and multimodal resources?

RQ3. How do linguistic resources interact with visual design to anchor meanings of gender and togetherness in McDonald's Portugal and McDonald's Morocco advertisements?

1. Literature Review

1.1 Intercultural advertising as cultural meaning-making

Advertising is widely treated as a culturally dense communicative form. It compresses social values, role expectations, and relational norms into short audiovisual narratives that must remain

immediately legible to local audiences while sustaining brand continuity. Intercultural research, therefore, approaches advertising not simply as persuasive language, but as semiotic design, a patterned staging of identities, relationships, and moral evaluations through image, sound, and text. Culture-linked meaning is often theorized through broad sensitizing frameworks such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and high/low-context communication, which help explain why some appeals are more normative in some contexts than others (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001; De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). At the same time, comparative advertising research repeatedly cautions that cultural models should be used heuristically, guiding questions and interpretation rather than as deterministic templates that predict meaning (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). This matters for global brands such as McDonald's, where localization decisions can shift the social scripts that ads normalize, while preserving recognizable brand aesthetics.

Empirical cross-cultural advertising work has long documented that markets differ in dominant value appeals, moral framings, and the kinds of social identities ads invite viewers to inhabit. Studies comparing Western/Arab contexts, for example, highlight patterned variation in the prominence of family/community cues, tradition/religion-linked themes, and the relative acceptability of sexuality or gendered display (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996; Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007; Kalliny et al., 2011; Nassif & Gunter, 2008). Such research supports treating advertising as intercultural discourse, as it is a site where everyday values and identities are not simply reflected but actively assembled and circulated.

1.2 Togetherness as a culturally inflected relational script

Togetherness in advertising is not a neutral or universal theme; it is a culturally shaped repertoire of relational cues through which ads suggest what counts as belonging and what forms of sociality are desirable. Value-based work indicates that audiences respond more favorably when advertised values align with self-construal, more independent or interdependent orientations, and with locally normative expectations about social bonds (van Baaren & Ruivenkamp, 2007). This implies that togetherness can be operationalized as an analytic domain not only in terms of whether people appear together, but also in terms of how togetherness is semiotically staged. In this study, these cue families are operationalized as a bounded set of togetherness categories to enable segment-level traceability to the audit trail.

Cross-cultural advertising studies across Arab/Western comparisons have repeatedly found stronger visibility of collective and family-oriented appeals in many Arab-market campaigns and stronger emphasis on individual achievement and direct persuasion in many Western-market

campaigns, while also noting variation by product type, target audience, and contemporary shifts (Kalliny & Gentry, 2007; Kalliny et al., 2011; Nassif & Gunter, 2008). Communication theory also suggests that cultural context differences shape how messages are handled explicitly, that is, what is stated directly and what is implied through shared assumptions, relational cues, and situational framing (Hall, 1976). For a Portugal–Morocco comparison, these points lead to the following focused question: when McDonald’s stages shared eating and social warmth, does it privilege family intimacy, peer sociability, romance, community festivity, or individual pleasure-with-others? And what kinds of moral evaluations become attached to those forms?

1.3 Gender portrayals in advertising: persistence, change, and cross-cultural variation

A substantial body of research treats advertising as a key site where gender ideology is reproduced and negotiated. Classic comparative work shows that gender portrayals vary cross-nationally, yet specific patterns recur. Women are often associated with domesticity, care, beauty, and relational labor, while men are more often associated with public authority, expertise, or action-oriented roles (Gilly, 1988). Meta-analytic evidence further indicates that despite social change, stereotypical portrayals persist, with uneven progress across regions, time, and media forms (Eisend, 2010; Matthes et al., 2016). Importantly, many quantitative comparative designs classify roles and settings but cannot completely capture how agency is produced and how voice authority, initiative, desirability, and moral worth are constructed through camera work, framing, gaze, editing, and narrative sequencing.

For this reason, gender-and-advertising studies increasingly emphasize multimodal questions, meaning who is granted speaking rights, who is shown acting, and who is being looked at, how bodies are framed, and how evaluation is attached to gendered figures via visual salience and interactional positioning (Ledin & Machin, 2018; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Feminist critical discourse analysis FCDA strengthens this by foregrounding gendered power relations and by treating discourse as a site where ideology becomes common sense through repeated semiotic patterns (Lazar, 2007). For a study centered on women and togetherness, FCDA helps interpret whether togetherness distributes emotional labor unevenly, naturalizes service roles, or grants differential autonomy and visibility. Accordingly, multimodal work motivates attention to women’s centrality, speaking rights/voice authority, role domain, agency/initiative, stylization/objectification, relational labor, respectability cues, and empowerment or ambivalence frames.

1.4 Local baselines for Portugal and Morocco in advertising and gender discourse

Portuguese advertising research provides useful baselines for tracking gendered voice and role positioning. Earlier comparative work reports systematic gender differences in Portuguese television advertising and documents changes over time, including shifts in female centrality and some movement toward less traditional portrayals (Neto & Pinto, 1998; Neto & Silva, 2009). Neto (2016) similarly underlines that gendered patterns remain visible in Portuguese advertising, even where changes occur. Beyond role frequency, Portugal-focused discourse analyses point to how femininity can be tied to beauty, evaluation, and forms of consumption, while masculinity can be linked to authority or competence. These gendered constructions benefit from multimodal analysis because meaning depends on how bodies, camera angles, and narrative voice are presented.

Recent Portugal-centered research also helps align togetherness and women's focus. Oliveira and Lapa's (2022) critical analysis of Portuguese beauty advertising demonstrates how empowerment messages can coexist with subtle constraints, making it a strong anchor for interpreting contemporary female representation in brand campaigns. Pereira and Veríssimo (2008) offer additional comparative grounding for Portuguese advertising and gender portrayals, supporting the interpretation of whether women's visibility corresponds to genuine initiative or to stylized presence. Studies comparing Brazilian and Portuguese contexts likewise help distinguish between Portuguese-specific and Lusophone-transnational patterns (Neto, 2016).

In Morocco, gender research reveals the salience of public/private boundaries, authority, respectability, and the social regulation of women's presence in public discourse. These spatial and social boundaries shape what is showable as the female presence in male-dominated public spaces can be construed as boundary-crossing and therefore subject to social management (Mernissi, 1987; Sadiqi, 2003). Advertising-oriented studies in Morocco further suggest tensions between tradition-linked values and imported imagery, including ongoing pressure toward beauty norms and occasional sexualization in commercial representation (Yamani, 2020; Lehfid, 2024). Yamani (2020), for instance, discuss Moroccan advertising as a site where traditional roles and Westernized values can coexist in contradictory ways, which is directly relevant to the study's interest in how women are portrayed. Alaoui's analysis of Moroccan TV advertising also supports the view that cultural value cues remain meaningful in Moroccan advertising discourse (Alaoui, n.d.).

Together, these Portugal and Morocco baselines justify the study's comparative logic. In other words, the two contexts are not treated as essentialized opposites but as historically and culturally situated markets in which gender ideologies and relational norms are negotiated through advertising semiotics.

1.5 Why a visual-led multimodal approach is necessary

Because the research questions target construction, we need tools that can analyze meaning beyond role labels. Social semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis treat images and audiovisual texts as structured systems in which meaning is made through representational, interactional, and compositional choices (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008; Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). Multimodal CDA extends this by linking micro-design choices to ideological effects, that is, how repeated patterns normalize identities, hierarchies, and moral evaluations (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2018). FCDA strengthens the interpretation of gendered power by asking whose perspectives are centered, whose voices carry authority, and how femininity/masculinity are made natural through discourse (Lazar, 2007).

A visual-led design is also methodologically justified because advertising persuasion often operates through implication, affect, and embodiment rather than just propositional language. Visual methodologies research therefore recommends making analytic decisions explicit, what counts as evidence, how images are sampled, and how interpretation is disciplined via systematic viewing protocols rather than impressionistic reading (Rose, 2016). Multimodal transcription approaches further support transparency by enabling the documentation of time-stamped shots, semiotic resources, and meaning clusters across scenes (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

1.6 Methodological quality and trustworthiness in an interpretive, coded study

Because the study involves interpretive coding, the literature recommends strengthening credibility by transparent procedures, reflexivity, and auditability. Tracy's "big-tent" criteria provide a widely used set of qualitative principles, namely: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical practice, and meaningful coherence, that can be used to justify design decisions and reporting choices (Tracy, 2010). Qualitative content analysis guidance likewise emphasizes systematic category development, clear unit-of-analysis decisions, and careful reporting of how codes were applied (Elo et al., 2014). Where multiple coders are involved, or coding stability is demonstrated through independent verification, content analysis standards recommend explicitly reporting agreement procedures (Lombard et al., 2002), and applied work argues that multiple coders can strengthen interpretive robustness once the workflow is clearly documented (Church et al., 2019).

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Rationale and framing of the study

This study conceptualizes McDonald's advertisements as culturally situated multimodal texts that organize social meanings through coordinated semiotic resources (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). The framework, therefore, combines social semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008) with critical and gender-sensitive perspectives (Lazar, 2007), while treating culture models as interpretive guides rather than as deterministic predictors (Ledin & Machin, 2018). The objective is to account for how togetherness and women's portrayal are made visible and persuasive through recurring visual and linguistic patterning in the Portuguese and Moroccan corpora, as recommended in visual research practice (Rose, 2016).

2.2 Social semiotics and the grammar of visual design

The core descriptive lens is social semiotics, which approaches meaning as socially produced and historically shaped rather than inherently contained in images. In this view, advertisements communicate through semiotic choices that are conventionalized within communities and reproduced across media practices. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) provide a systematic account of how images realize representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings. These meaning potentials are operational for advertising analysis because they enable principled descriptions of who is represented as acting, who is positioned as a viewer and addressee, and which elements are made salient through framing, information structure, and visual prominence.

Systemic-functional multimodal discourse analysis additionally reinforces the need to examine how semiotic resources work together across modes, particularly in audiovisual media, where language, image, and sound form integrated meaning complexes (O'Halloran, 2008). Multimodal transcription is therefore treated as an analytic practice that makes cross-modal patterning visible and comparable across texts, consistent with the tradition of multimodal transcription (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). This descriptive infrastructure is essential for a visual-led design because it specifies what counts as evidence and how interpretive claims can be traced to segment-level observations.

2.3 Multimodal critical discourse analysis and ideology in advertising

While social semiotics supports systematic description, the present study also requires an interpretive lens that can link semiotic patterning to power, identity, and normative expectations. Multimodal critical discourse analysis treats advertisements as sites where ideologies are naturalized through repeated semiotic choices that come to feel ordinary and culturally appropriate. Machin and Mayr (2012) provide a practical, critical approach to examine how visual selections and exclusions, lexical choices, and design conventions construct social actors and legitimate particular values. Ledin

and Machin (2018) extend this orientation by stressing the materiality of multimodal meaning and by supporting analysis of how design choices organize social relations through form, placement, and modality.

Within the present framework, togetherness is treated not merely as a theme but as a discursive accomplishment that establishes moral evaluations of social relations. Women's portrayal is treated as a discursive accomplishment that distributes visibility, agency, and legitimacy in patterned ways. Critical interpretation, however, is disciplined by the audit trail and by segment-level evidence, so that claims about ideology remain anchored in observable semiotic configurations rather than in impressionistic reading.

2.4 Feminist critical discourse analysis and gendered power relations

Because women's portrayal is a central analytic domain, the framework incorporates feminist critical discourse analysis. Lazar (2007) argues that gender ideology is reproduced through discourse practices that render unequal relations normal, desirable, or inevitable. This orientation supports analysis of how advertisements allocate speaking rights, decision-making authority, emotional labor, and moral evaluation, and how such allocations intersect with representations of family, intimacy, and communal belonging.

The framework also draws on established gender and advertising scholarship that documents the persistence of stereotypical role distributions while recognizing variation across time and contexts. Comparative baseline work, such as Gilly (1988), and large-scale synthesis studies, such as Eisend (2010) and Matthes and colleagues (2016), demonstrate that gendered portrayals remain patterned in advertising even as forms and intensities shift. These studies justify an analytical focus that moves beyond simple role counts toward the semiotic construction of agency, authority, and relational positioning.

To strengthen contextual sensitivity, the study also engages research on gender and discourse in Morocco and related cultural debates. Work by Mernissi (1987) and Sadiqi (2003) foregrounds the social regulation of gendered visibility and respectability, offering interpretive resources for the analysis of how public femininity is framed and constrained. Morocco-focused advertising studies similarly highlight tensions between traditional value orientations and globalized commercial aesthetics, including the circulation of beauty norms and the negotiation of women's roles in public commercial discourse (Alaoui, n.d.; Lehfid, 2024). These perspectives are used to sensitize interpretation without reducing Moroccan advertising to a single cultural logic.

2.5 Culture as sensitizing heuristics in comparative interpretation

The cross-cultural comparison is supported by cultural frameworks used as sensitizing heuristics. Hall's account of contexting and communication styles provides an interpretive vocabulary for differences in explicitness and implication, particularly where relational meaning is conveyed through shared assumptions rather than through direct propositional statements (Hall, 1976). Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a widely used comparative framework for thinking about value orientations, especially individualism and collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001), while De Mooij and Hofstede (2010) caution that such dimensions should be used to guide interpretation rather than to predict specific textual outcomes. Inglehart and Baker (2000) similarly stress cultural change and the persistence of traditional values, reminding comparative work to remain attentive to historical shifts and internal diversity.

Within advertising research, persuasive appeals are often linked to cultural orientations. Han and Shavitt (1994) show that persuasion can be patterned in ways that align with individualistic and collectivistic orientations. Kalliny and Gentry (2007) and Kalliny and colleagues (2011) provide comparative evidence that value cues and relational appeals differ across Arab and United States advertising contexts, supporting the view that togetherness is culturally inflected and can be empirically traced through recurring semiotic patterns rather than assumed in advance. Van Baaren and Ruivenkamp (2007) further support an interpretive focus on self-construal and values as they are expressed in advertising discourse. These works provide a comparative backdrop that legitimizes the study's focus on togetherness while keeping interpretation anchored in the corpus.

2.6 Operationalizing the two core constructs

The framework defines the study's constructs in an analytically explicit manner and is compatible with multimodal evidence. Togetherness is conceptualized as relational scripting. It refers to how advertisements stage forms of belonging through group configuration, proximity and touch, shared gaze and mutual attention, coordinated action, commensality and sharing customs, and the affective and moral tone attached to sociality. Social semiotics supports the description of these cues through interpersonal and compositional meaning resources, while comparative advertising research supports interpreting their cultural resonance in context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007).

Women's portrayal is conceptualized in terms of visibility, agency, and interactional positioning. It refers to how advertisements distribute narrative centrality and visual salience, allocate initiative and action, grant speaking rights and directive force, and position women within relational scripts of care, service, celebration, or autonomy. Feminist critical discourse analysis supports

interpreting how such distributions normalize gendered power relations, while gender and advertising research provides comparative baselines for evaluating whether portrayals reproduce or contest stereotypical patterns (Lazar, 2007; Gilly, 1988; Eisend, 2010; Matthes et al., 2016).

Across both constructs, language serves as a supportive anchor rather than as the primary analytic mode. Spoken lines and on-screen text are treated as resources that stabilize the preferred reading of images or allocate roles and evaluations, consistent with a visual-led methodological commitment grounded in visual methodology and multimodal analysis (Rose, 2016; O'Halloran, 2008).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and analytic orientation

This study adopts a comparative qualitative design informed by visual-led multimodal discourse analysis to examine how togetherness and women are constructed in McDonald's video advertising in Portugal and Morocco. Advertisements are approached as multimodal texts in which meaning is produced through coordinated semiotic resources that include moving image, composition, gaze, gesture, spatial relations, and speech (Rose, 2016; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008). The analytical method draws on social semiotics to systematically describe the potential of visual meaning, and on multimodal critical discourse analysis to connect semiotic choices to ideological positioning and social relations (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2018).

Since women's portrayal is a central focus, interpretation is additionally informed by Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which foregrounds gendered power relations and the discursive naturalization of inequality (Lazar, 2007). The comparison is grounded in the corpus rather than within deterministic claims about national cultures. Cultural models are used as sensitizing heuristics that support interpretation of patterned meaning-making while remaining attentive to contextual variability and historical change (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010; Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

3.2 Data selection and corpus construction

The corpus consists of 20 publicly available video advertisements posted by the official McDonald's YouTube channels for Portugal and Morocco (10 per context). The corpus spans uploads from May 2022 to January 2026. Sampling followed a stratified purposive strategy to ensure comparability across platforms and genres and to secure adequate representation of the study's two analytic domains. Two screening strata were used at the advertisement level: together-salient versus

women-salient, with an equal split within each context². The sampling theme indicates the inclusion rationale at the advertisement level, not exclusive analytic coding membership. The theme assignment was made during screening and did not constrain segment-level coding; segments across the corpus were evaluated for togetherness and women's construction, as relevant. Each advertisement was recorded in a corpus register with title, corpus ID, channel name and country, upload date, duration, and URL (Table 1).

² **Portugal:** 5 togetherness-salient + 5 women-salient; **Morocco:** 5 togetherness-salient + 5 women-salient.

Channel Name	Title	Corpus ID	Upload Date	Duration	URL
McDonald's Portugal	MacTrack 2025: o teu ano, o teu hit. Dá play à Nenny na App!	PT-W-01	13-Jan-26	1:22	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqtycUOE93w
	Fan Favorites	PT-W-02	7-Oct-25	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zatjcVogHro
	Coleção Copocromática	PT-W-03	27-Jun-25	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HL1-c-uDjE
	Tu Mereces Mac – Cupão MyM McChicken	PT-W-04	11-Feb-25	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw-XanHmaiw
	Tu Mereces Mac – Cupão MyM BigMac	PT-W-05	11-Feb-25	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPCusa3otzw
	McSorriso 2024	PT-T-01	12-Nov-24	1:25	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjisSEaNQaE
	No Natal, quem adora Mac, merece Mac.	PT-T-02	20-Nov-24	0:30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZdp91iZjXQ
	Happy Meal – Jurassic parque	PT-T-03	5-Feb-25	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVQW1dcY7fl
	Menu Almoço	PT-T-04	22-Sep-25	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=041h3_Sidns
	Ouve Avós do Verão	PT-T-05	1-Jul-25	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmKMBKEbwz4
McDonald's MAROC	Tuto – Kifach tcharek bach tamchi l'QATAR 2022™!	MA-W-01	13-Oct-22	0:50	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1gYcPJ_HLM
	Chen, Ten, Had sif m3a McDo, scanni w rbe7!	MA-W-02	19-Jul-24	1:19	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiH-E9bZ6jU
	Finma kanet jma3a McDelivery™ m3aha	MA-W-03	24-Jan-24	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_584AjerBdg

McDonald's Maroc – Kayn Sahd? Kayn McDo!	MA-W-04	29-Jul-22	0:33	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Hi3cjfP8i4
Un Happy Meal™ et bien plus encore !	MA-W-05	5-May-22	0:15	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5CBPJkBiW8
كل العائلة ديال ماكدونالدز المغرب كاتمنى لكم رمضان كريم	MA-T-01	1-Mar-25	0:23	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oZaMD1Z7dM
Kifma kanet jma3a, McDelivery ™ m3aha	MA-T-02	30-Jan-24	0:19	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TY-7AkCXbI
L McShaker™ fries, LJADID f techkila li ghandiw biha la COUPE!	MA-T-03	26-Dec- 25	0:30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FurX8rMWQA
Finma kant jma3a kaynin m3aha!	MA-T-04	17-Jan-24	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2icAGHvW2U
Finma kanet jma3a McDelivery ™ m3aha	MA-T-05	21-Jan-24	0:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzwwgwwXcWwk

Table 1: corpus register

To support traceability and sampling transparency, the audit-trail workbook also records languages used and brief descriptive notes for each advertisement. Sampling logic follows cross-cultural advertising work that treats appeals and value cues as empirically observable patterns within comparable ad forms while demanding message-level grounding (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007; Kalliny et al., 2011).

3.3 Unit of analysis and segmentation

The primary unit of analysis is the segment, since audiovisual meaning unfolds temporally. Segmentation was treated as an explicit analytic decision and documented systematically because unitization shapes what becomes available for interpretation (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011; Baldry & Thibault, 2006). Segments were defined as coherent units of meaning indicated by changes in setting, participant configuration, action goal, or camera framing that alter interpersonal meaning, or salient verbal anchorage through voiceover or on-screen slogans (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008). Each segment was assigned a stable identifier and a time range to support traceability across transcription, coding, and reporting. Across the 20 advertisements, segmentation produced 162 segments, which were indexed with start and end timecodes to enable reproducible retrieval and evidence checking.

3.4 Multimodal transcription and data preparation

Each segment was transcribed using a multimodal template designed for visual-led analysis. The transcription recorded timecodes and scene descriptions, participants and interactional configurations, visual variables that support interpersonal and compositional interpretation, and embodied action such as gesture, touch, and spatial proximity (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011; Baldry & Thibault, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008). Spoken languages and on-screen texts were selectively transcribed, with emphasis on lines that anchor interpretation, convey evaluation, allocate roles, or explicitly frame togetherness and gendered positioning. Where Portuguese or Moroccan Arabic and Darija elements are analytically relevant, the original wording was retained in the dataset, and translations/glosses were produced for reported excerpts as needed, consistent with principles of transparency in visual research (Rose, 2016). To maintain segment-level traceability between the moving image and analytic claims, frames were captured and organized into a segment-linked evidence set, aligned with the same identifiers and timecodes used in transcription and coding.

3.5 Coding framework and operational focus

A hybrid coding strategy combined theory-informed categories with corpus-responsive refinement. Theory-informed coding drew on social semiotics and multimodal critical discourse analysis to capture how interpersonal relations and ideological meanings are enacted through visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2018). Feminist critical discourse analysis informed gender-focused categories that attend to women's agency, voice, authority, and the normalization of gendered power relations (Lazar, 2007). A codebook specifying

definitions and decision rules was maintained and updated through analytic memos in line with qualitative content analysis guidance (Elo et al., 2014).

Togetherness was operationalized as relational scripting. Codes captured group configuration, proximity and touch, shared gaze and mutual attention, coordinated action, commensality and sharing customs, inclusion and exclusion boundaries, and the affective and moral evaluation attached to sociality. This operationalization follows comparative advertising research that links persuasion to culturally meaningful relational orientations as it requires empirical grounding in specific messages (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007; Kalliny et al., 2011).

Women's portrayal was operationalized through visibility, agency, and interactional positioning. Codes captured narrative and visual centrality, domain and role positioning, initiative and action, voice authority through speaking rights and directive force, and relational positioning. This focus draws on gender and advertising research while shifting the emphasis from frequency counts to the multimodal construction of meaning (Gilly, 1988; Eisend, 2010; Matthes et al., 2016; Lazar, 2007).

3.6 Analytical procedure and documentation

Analysis proceeded through an auditable sequence that links corpus registration, segmentation, transcription and evidence preparation, coding, and cross-context comparison. Advertisements were segmented into meaning-bearing units using start and end time codes, and spoken/on-screen language was transcribed in a standardized template. Segment records included salient visual features and anchorage type to support RQ3. All analytic steps were documented in an audit-trail workbook that links (i) corpus registration metadata, (ii) segment indexing with timecodes, (iii) modality notes, and (iv) coder assignments and resolved codes for Togetherness and Women. This structure enables segment-level traceability from claims in the Results back to coded evidence. A cross-context comparison was conducted by tracing recurring cue patterns across segment IDs and advertisement-level summaries, with interpretive claims grounded in the audit trail memos and codebook decision rules (Tracy, 2010; Elo et al., 2014).

3.7 Trustworthiness and quality procedures

Trustworthiness was supported by explicit unitization, systematic transcription, transparent code definitions, and evidence-linked claims. The study draws on qualitative quality principles that emphasize rigor, credibility, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010) and follows qualitative content analysis guidance that stresses auditable category development and transparent reporting of analytic phases (Elo et al., 2014). The audit trail documents corpus metadata, segment indexing with timecodes, codebook definitions and decision rules, coding outputs, and analytic memos, enabling interpretive

claims to be traced to segment identifiers and timecodes. Dependability was strengthened by double-coding segments that met the eligibility rule³ for each domain. The author and an independent coder trained in the study's codebooks applied the togetherness and women codebooks to eligible segments (togetherness: $n = 72$; women: $n = 89$). The independent coder was not involved in the study design, theoretical framing, or interpretation of findings and participated exclusively in the coding and agreement phase. Agreement was calculated as an order-insensitive exact match of multi-label code sets. Code-set assignments by the author and the independent coder matched on all eligible segments, yielding 100% agreement for Togetherness (72/72) and 100% for Women (89/89), with 161 eligible decisions overall (Church et al., 2019). Segments with no eligible assignment for a given domain were excluded from agreement computation for that domain.

4. Results

This section reports the main cross-context patterns observed in the corpus of 20 McDonald's video advertisements from Portugal and Morocco, studied through segment-level multimodal transcription and coding. The three research questions organize findings. Segment identifiers are provided to maintain traceability to the audit trail and the corpus register.

4.1 Togetherness constructions through visual and multimodal resources (RQ1)

4.1.1 Portugal: togetherness as everyday co-presence, sharing, and intergenerational intimacy

Within the Portuguese subset, togetherness is most consistently realized through ambient co-presence and commensality/sharing (Table 2). Across items, the ads repeatedly normalize being-with-others as an everyday condition while positioning shared food as a practical anchor for social coordination. In the "Menu Almoço" advertisement, for instance, togetherness is framed through a weekday rhythm and everyday proximity, with voiceover lines that construe co-presence as a shared, ongoing state rather than a one-off event (PT-T-04_S05–S09)⁴.

At the same time, family intimacy is present in multiple Portuguese items and becomes especially salient when the ad allocates extended interactional time to face-to-face talk. In the "Ouve Avós do Verão" advertisement, togetherness is constructed as intergenerational closeness (Figure 1) through sustained dialogue, teasing, and embodied proximity, with the grandparents positioned as affective authorities and the younger woman as an attentive recipient (PT-T-05_S01–S07). In the

³ Eligibility is defined as segments where both the author and the independent coder assigned at least one code for the relevant domain

⁴ Codes like (PT-T-04_S05–S09) are audit-trail segment anchors: PT/MA = country; T/W = togetherness/women subset; 04 = ad ID; S05–S09 = segments 5–9 (time-coded).

“McSorriso” advertisement, intimacy and belonging are further moralized through a cause-participation framing that welcomes viewers into an inclusive community of support (PT-T-01_S04–S06).



Figure 1. PT-T-05

A more minor but analytically significant pattern links togetherness to seasonal ritual. In the Christmas advertisement, togetherness is anchored through festive timing and gift logic, with the evaluative formulation *no Natal, quem adora Mac merece Mac* ‘At Christmas, whoever loves McDonald’s deserves McDonald’s, functioning as a verbal seal that frames celebration as moralized reciprocity (PT-T-02_S09). Notably, the ad also blends interpersonal togetherness with public-facing address and recognition (PT-T-02_S01–S08), producing a hybrid sociality in which community is performed through explicit address and platform-like naming. At the same time, the narrative unfolds in domestic space.

4.1.2 Morocco: togetherness as group scripting, negotiation, and delivery-enabled gathering

Within the Moroccan subset, togetherness is frequently organized as a group condition that is named, negotiated, and then stabilized through shared consumption (Table 2). A recurring linguistic anchor is the generalized *lik* ‘we all’, which frames the scenario as common social knowledge and positions viewers inside a collective common sense from the opening lines (MA-T-02_S01; MA-T-04_S01). In McDelivery narratives, togetherness is enacted as a coordination sequence, proposing food, refusing, and then reversing that refusal once McDonald’s becomes available, with short dialogue tokens like *McDo?* ‘Do you want McDonald’s?’ functioning as interactional triggers that move the group toward alignment (MA-T-04_S03; MA-T-05_S03).

Alongside these scripts, togetherness is also framed through family-oriented scenes and intergenerational inclusion (Figure 2) in a smaller number of items (Table 2), where spoken anchorage explicitly links sociality to making *نفرح الصغير و الكبير* ‘the young and the old happy’ (MA-T-01_S04)

or to family-level co-presence and shared time. In the Ramadan greeting ad, togetherness is framed through an inclusive, community-oriented voiceover that narrates shared social care and cultural timing, culminating in a collective greeting (MA-T-01_S01–S07).



Figure 2. MA-T-01

4.1.3 Cross-context contrast: what counts as being together

Across both contexts, commensality and ambient co-presence function as supporting resources (Table 2), but their narrative roles differ. In the Portuguese subset, togetherness is more frequently anchored through intimate interactional sequencing, notably intergenerational dialogue, and through inclusive invitations that pull the viewer into a community-of-support framing. In the Moroccan subset, togetherness is more often staged as a group coordination problem resolved through shared consumption and delivery-enabled access, with generalized “we all...” openings and compact dialogue tokens serving as the pragmatic engine of the scene. These contrasts are corpus-patterned tendencies within the present subsets and should be read as interpretive orientations grounded in the sampled ads, not as deterministic national generalizations.

Pattern	Operational code(s)	PT prevalence	MA prevalence	PT exemplar anchors	MA exemplar anchors
Belonging/inclusion	T7	3	1	PT-T-01_S05 (VO): “parte desta causa ...”	MA-T-01_S02 (VO): “كل الناس ضيفي”
Sharing as togetherness	T5	4	4	PT-T-04_S08 (VO): “vosso menu almoço...”	MA-T-01_S03 (VO) “كنسرفي الناس ...”

Family intimacy	T1	3	2	PT-T-05_S04 (DI): “ Então, avó, nada de romance ” [visual: close framing; intergenerational touch] ⁵	MA-T-01_S04 (VO) “ونفرح الصغير والكبير”
Ambient co-presence	T10	5	4	PT-T-04_S05 (VO) “precisam de um escape”	MA-T-02_S01 (VO): “كلنا عندنا هداك لي وسط الفيلم كاينعس”

Table 2: Togetherness patterns (RQ1) by context with ad-level prevalence and exemplar segment anchors.

Note. Prevalence = number of advertisements (out of 5 per context in the Togetherness subset) where the pattern occurs at least once in the resolved dataset. VO = voiceover; DI = dialogue/interaction; OS = on-screen text; OU = other/unclear.

4.2 Women’s positioning and portrayal through visual and multimodal resources (RQ2)

4.2.1 Portugal: women as voiced subjects, cultural performers, and ordinary agents under pressure

Within the Portuguese subset, women are frequently constructed as central addressees, whose positioning is stabilized through a combination of visual salience and voicing. In the “MacTrack” advertisement, the female singer sustains central framing and carries the interactional voice, constructing the viewer as “you” while linking everyday strain to a reward logic that culminates in the refrain *tu mereces* ‘You deserve it’ (PT-W-01_S26–S29). Here, voice authority and visual centrality jointly produce a subject position of deservingness and self-recognition.

A second Portuguese pattern foregrounds women’s everyday overload and relational management. In the “Tu Mereces Mac” advertisement, a male voiceover enumerates demands directed at a female subject who is positioned as constantly available to family, friends, and digital notifications (PT-W-04_S01–S05). The narrative resolves this pressure through a compensatory consumption move presented as a deserved break (PT-W-04_S06). Visually, the ad intensifies fatigue and emotional strain through private interior framing and embodied heaviness before shifting toward a relief trajectory (Figure 3).

⁵ Note. Exemplars list short Key Text extracts because linguistic resources function as anchorage and facilitate traceability (Segment ID). Codes are assigned based on the full multimodal ensemble (visual composition, interactional cues, and language); where the code is primarily visual (e.g., intimacy), a brief visual-cue bracket is provided.



Figure 3. PT-W-04

4.2.2 Morocco: women as central figures within promotional scripts and negotiated group inclusion

Within the Moroccan subset, women are often visually central, but authority in voice is more unevenly distributed across ad formats. In instructional and promotional scenes, epistemic and procedural authority are typically carried by a male voiceover. At the same time, a girl supplies brief question turns and confirmations, an arrangement that positions authoritative procedural knowledge as masculine and the female figure as the learner-user within the interaction (MA-W-02_S01–S08).

In peer-group delivery narratives, women's centrality is tied to relational negotiation and the management of inclusion. In the "McDelivery" scene, for instance, a young woman's *؟انا؟ نسيوني* 'Did you forget about me?' frames inclusion as a negotiated entitlement inside friendship (MA-W-03_S07), while short checking turns. *McDo?* 'Do you want McDo?' *؟متأكدة* 'Are you sure?', stage relational labor as part of group coordination (MA-W-03_S03; MA-W-03_S05). A contrasting case appears in the Happy Meal advertisement, where a female voiceover frames the product in a care-adjacent register (MA-W-05_S01), showing that female voicing is possible but concentrated in specific subgenres.

4.2.3 Cross-context contrast: visibility does not equal authority

Both subsets include women in prominent visual positions, yet authority is distributed differently across narrative functions (Table 3). Portuguese ads more frequently grant women the right to define the viewer's position through sustained voicing *tu mereces* 'you deserve it', whereas Moroccan ads more often locate authoritative explanation in male voiceovers in tutorial/promo scenes, while women's agency is more visible in relational negotiation within peer-group scripts. Across both contexts, women's positioning is tightly linked to the type of sociality being staged: when the ad's logic is instruction and procedure, voice authority tends to shift toward explanatory registers; when the logic is group negotiation, women's centrality is enacted through relational and interactional labor.

Pattern	Operational code(s)	PT prevalence	MA prevalence	PT exemplar anchors	MA exemplar anchors
Women’s visibility / centrality	W1	5	4	PT-W-01_S10 (DI): “esquece tudo porque tu mereces.” [female singer centered/close framing]	MA-W-02_S03 (DI): “اه او منبعد” [girl as interactional focal]
Female voice authority	W2	3	1	PT-W-02_S04 (VO): “Cria e usa o teu cupão...”	MA-W-05_S02 (VO): “de la joie”
Domestic / caregiving positioning	W3	0	1	Not attested (0/5)	MA-W-05_S01 (VO): “Un Happy meal” [child-facing care scene / caregiver framing]
Empowerment / self-definition frame	W9	2	0	PT-W-03_S03 (VO): “e arrasa com a nova coleção” [imperative + self-styling empowerment cue]	Not attested (0/5)

Table 3. Women portrayal patterns and prevalence (RQ2)

Note. Prevalence = number of advertisements (out of 5 per context in the Women portrayal subset) where the pattern occurs at least once in the resolved dataset. VO = voiceover; DI = dialogue/interaction; OS = on-screen text.

4.3 Linguistic resources and their interaction with visual design (RQ3)

4.3.1 Portuguese anchorage: evaluative address, humor, and public-facing recognition

Portuguese advertisements rely strongly on direct second-person address and evaluative lexis to anchor the meaning of both togetherness and gender. The repeated *mereces* formulation does more than advertise value; it scripts a moral economy in which the female subject’s everyday pressures warrant reward, and the visuals strengthen this by foregrounding fatigue, private space, and later relief (PT-W-04; PT-W-01). In togetherness items, humor and conversational timing anchor intimacy, as in the intergenerational teasing in (PT-T-05). The Christmas ad adds a further anchoring layer by integrating personalized public address and named recognition, thereby constructing togetherness as both interpersonal and publicly ratified (PT-T-02).

4.3.2 Moroccan anchorage: generalized, group terms, and slogan closure

Moroccan advertisements repeatedly use generalized openings like *كلنا* ‘we all’ to name shared social configurations directly, positioning the viewer inside a collective common sense from the outset (MA-T-02_S01; MA-T-04_S01; MA-W-03_S01). In delivery narratives, compact dialogue *McDo?* and closure lines *كيف ما كانت جماعة* ‘Whatever the group is like’ fix a portable togetherness meaning

around logistical access and shared consumption (MA-W-03_S03–S09; MA-T-04_S03–S07). Code-switching also serves as a branding resource, linking local social scripts to global product labels and visually aligning corporate identity with locally legible interactional routines.

4.3.3 Interactional effect: language stabilizes the reading path for gender and togetherness

Across both contexts, linguistic resources frequently determine how viewers are instructed to read the visual scene. When visuals depict collective co-presence, slogans and repeated lexical anchors specify whether the scene should be understood as family intimacy, peer-group coordination, seasonal ritual, or deserved self-care. Linguistic anchorage also shapes gender meanings by distributing who explains, who invites, who negotiates inclusion, and who is addressed. Rather than treating language as supplementary, the corpus shows that verbal and written elements often function as the interpretive key that narrows the meaning potential of the visual layer, especially for moral evaluation and role allocation.

5. Discussion

This study examined how togetherness and women are constructed in McDonald's Portugal and McDonald's Morocco advertisements through visual-led multimodal analysis, with language treated as supportive anchorage. The discussion interprets the main tendencies reported in the results through the analytical lenses adopted in the framework. It relates them to the reviewed literature on multimodality, cross-cultural advertising, and gender representation.

5.1 Togetherness as culturally patterned relational scripting

The first contribution of the findings is to show that togetherness operates as a culturally patterned relational script rather than a generic advertising theme. Within the togetherness-salient subset, the Portuguese items most consistently stage togetherness through everyday co-presence and sharing (Table 4), with interpersonal intimacy intensified when the narrative allocates sustained time to face-to-face interaction, most notably in intergenerational dialogue sequences. Togetherness is also stabilized through culturally timed ritual cues (e.g., seasonal celebration logics) and, in at least one case, through public-facing recognition that blends domestic sociality with a named or publicly ratified address. In the Moroccan togetherness-salient subset, togetherness is more frequently organized as a collectively framed condition (Table 4) that is explicitly named and enacted through coordination sequences. Generalized openings position the viewer inside shared common sense *LiK* 'we all', while compact dialogue tokens and closure lines fix togetherness to a portable, delivery-enabled configuration of gathering. A further Moroccan pattern foregrounds culturally timed communal

greetings and moral evaluation of social care, for instance, in the Ramadan greeting format, showing that togetherness can also be anchored through moralized hospitality talk rather than only through coordination-and-consumption scripts (Picture 3).

Togetherness_Cod e	Morocco		Portugal		Total	
	Count	Pct_of_segme nts	Count	Pct_of_segm ents	Count	Pct_of_segme nts
T1_Family_Intim acy	5	14.7%	12	30.8%	17	23.3%
T2_Peer_Friendsh ip	7	20.6%	2	5.1%	9	12.3%
T3_Couple_Roma nce	0	0.0%	1	2.6%	1	1.4%
T4_Community_P ublic	12	35.3%	11	28.2%	23	31.5%
T5_Commensality _Sharing	15	44.1%	9	23.1%	24	32.9%
T6_Embodied_Cl oseness	2	5.9%	3	7.7%	5	6.8%
T7_Inclusion_Belo nging	3	8.8%	16	41.0%	19	26.0%
T8_Celebration_R itual	2	5.9%	1	2.6%	3	4.1%
T9_Care_Support	1	2.9%	5	12.8%	6	8.2%
T10_CoPresence_ Ambient	16	47.1%	13	33.3%	29	39.7%

Table 4: Togetherness cues frequency

This contrast corresponds with cross-cultural advertising research that argues that persuasive appeals are not culturally neutral but are patterned through value-linked relational orientations that become visible in recurrent communicative choices (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007; Kalliny et al., 2011). The present study extends that line of work by demonstrating how such orientations are realized not only in verbal appeals but also through recurring multimodal configurations, including group composition, proxemics, action synchrony, and ritual timing.

The results also support careful interpretive use of culture models. Rather than treating cultural dimensions as predictors, the analysis used them as sensitizing heuristics that help interpret why specific togetherness scripts are made salient within a given corpus (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Inglehart and Baker (2000) stress cultural persistence and change, which is consistent with the finding that both corpora mix continuity and innovation. The Portuguese subset draws on familiar intimacy and ritual scripts while also accommodating platform-like public recognition. The Moroccan subset

draws on collective naming and communal greeting while integrating global brand infrastructure through delivery discourse. The implication is that togetherness in global brand advertising is best understood as a negotiated repertoire of locally legible relational forms articulated through standardized commercial infrastructures, rather than as a stable national trait.

5.2 Women's construction through visibility, agency, and voice authority

The second contribution concerns how women are constructed across the women-salient subset. The findings confirm a key point in gender and advertising research. Visibility does not necessarily entail authority. Prior research has shown that advertising often reproduces gendered role distributions and authority even as surface forms evolve (Gilly, 1988; Eisend, 2010; Matthes et al., 2016). The present analysis refines this insight by showing that authority is distributed across the advertisement's multimodal resources and genre functions.

In the Portuguese women-salient items, women are frequently positioned as addressed subjects, stabilized by a coupling of visual centrality and voicing, especially in music/performance formats that allow sustained framing and direct second-person address. At the same time, the Portuguese subset also constructs women as ordinary agents under pressure, where relational availability and overload are narratively enumerated and then resolved through a reward logic. This matters because it shows how empowerment-coded address and recognition can co-exist with an implied norm of constant responsiveness, with consumption positioned as compensation for emotional and relational labor.

In Moroccan women's salient items, women are often visually central, but authority in voice is more unevenly distributed across ad types. In procedural or tutorial formats, authoritative knowledge is often delivered in a male voiceover, while the female figure is positioned as the learner-user in the interaction. In peer-group delivery narratives, women's agency becomes more visible through interactional negotiation where inclusion is managed, entitlement is voiced, and relational coordination is performed through talk. A further contrasting case is the child-/care-adjacent advertising format, where female voicing can occur, but within a narrower, family-consumption register. Interpreted through feminist critical discourse analysis, these patterns are not reducible to what is present and absent, instead, they point instead to a patterned differentiation in what kinds of authority women are more likely to embody across formats; either procedural/epistemic authority or relational/interactional authority, and this is consistent with FCDA's attention to normalized allocations of speaking rights, initiative, and moral evaluation (Lazar, 2007).

Importantly, this discussion remains corpus-grounded. The study does not claim that Moroccan women's authority is primarily hospitality-based across the board (a claim that would require stronger women-salient evidence than the current subset provides). Instead, the present results support a more

specific claim: Moroccan women are repeatedly constructed as relational negotiators in peer-group scripts. At the same time, instructional authority is frequently asserted by men in tutorial/promo scenes.

5.3 Linguistic anchorage as a stabilizer of preferred readings

The third research question concerned how language interacts with visual design to anchor meanings of gender and togetherness. The results show that language frequently stabilizes the preferred reading path of the visual scene. In the Portuguese corpus, evaluative formulations, such as merit and deservingness, function as a moral frame that reinterprets fatigue and private strain as legitimate grounds for reward; the visuals strengthen this through embodied heaviness and later relief. In the Moroccan corpus, recurring lexical anchors and slogan-like closures name the social configuration directly and then fix togetherness to a portable configuration that can be activated through delivery and shared consumption. In the Ramadan greeting format, the linguistic layer additionally anchors togetherness by explicit moral and affective talk that frames social care as a culturally timed communal practice. In both contexts, language works less as an independent object of analysis and more as an anchoring resource that narrows the meaning potential of the visual layer.

This is consistent with the general multimodal premise that meaning is distributed across modes and that interpretation depends on how semiotic resources co-pattern (O'Halloran, 2008). It is also consistent with social semiotic accounts, showing that while visuals offer meaning potential through gaze, framing, and salience, verbal anchorage directs attention, allocates roles, and supplies moral evaluation that may not be fully recoverable from images alone (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). From a critical perspective, this anchoring function matters because it can naturalize ideological readings by presenting them as common sense, consistent with multimodal critical discourse approaches that emphasize how routine devices (slogans, address forms, closure lines) stabilize normative meanings (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2018).

5.4 Theoretical implications for visual-led multimodal analysis of advertising

Methodologically and theoretically, the study illustrates the value of combining social semiotics with multimodal critical discourse analysis and feminist CDA in advertising research. Social semiotics provides a disciplined vocabulary for describing how relational positioning is constructed visually. Multimodal critical discourse analysis enables the interpretation of how these patterns contribute to ideological framing and social normalization. Feminist CDA strengthens the analysis by directing attention to gendered distributions of agency and authority that may appear natural in everyday advertising forms (Lazar, 2007). The findings also reinforce the view that multimodal transcription and segmentation are not neutral technical procedures but core analytic practices that

shape the evidential basis of claims, as emphasized in multimodal methodology (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Bezemer & Mavers, 2011; Rose, 2016).

The comparative design further supports a nuanced use of culture theory in advertising analysis. Rather than explaining differences by invoking cultural dimensions as causes, the results show how culture is enacted as a repertoire of recognizable scripts, values, and relational forms that brands mobilize for persuasion. This approach aligns with cautionary perspectives that emphasize the heuristic, interpretive use of cultural models and attention to change (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010; Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

5.5 Practical implications for intercultural brand communication

The findings suggest practical implications for how global brands localize relational and gendered meanings. Togetherness scripts are not interchangeable across contexts, even within the same global brand. In the Portuguese togetherness subset, togetherness gains legitimacy through everyday co-presence, sharing, intergenerational intimacy, and culturally timed ritual cues, with occasional mediation through public recognition formats. In the Moroccan togetherness subset, togetherness gains legitimacy through collective naming, coordination sequences, and delivery-enabled portability, alongside culturally timed communal greeting and moral evaluation. From an intercultural communication standpoint, this suggests that localization is not merely translation but calibration of (i) the social unit of belonging, (ii) the moral tone attached to sociality, and (iii) which narrative functions carry authority. With respect to gender, the findings indicate that empowerment-coded visibility can coexist with patterned limits on voice authority and role positioning. Brands that aim to communicate inclusively should therefore attend not only to whether women appear on screen but also to how speaking rights, instruction, decision-making, and moral authority are distributed within the multimodal design.

5.6 Limitations and future directions

Although the study yielded interesting results across both contexts, it is important to note some limitations. First, the corpus is compact and platform-specific. The study prioritizes depth of multimodal analysis rather than statistical generalization. Second, the analysis focuses on preferred readings constructed by the advertisements and does not include reception data. Future work could combine multimodal analysis with audience interviews or comment analysis to examine how viewers negotiate these scripts. Finally, although the study uses cultural frameworks as sensitizing heuristics, future work could broaden the comparative base beyond two contexts or triangulate with additional regional campaigns to test how robust the identified scripts are across time and product lines.

Conclusion

This study examined how McDonald's Portugal and McDonald's Morocco video advertisements construct togetherness and women through a visual-led, multimodal discourse-analytic approach, while also tracing how spoken and on-screen language anchors preferred readings of the visual layer. Using a corpus of 20 official YouTube ads and a segment-based audit trail, the analysis showed that togetherness operates as a culturally patterned relational script realized through recurring configurations of group composition, proximity, shared attention, coordinated action, and commensality. Across both contexts, women's portrayal demonstrated that visibility does not automatically translate into authority, but that agency and legitimacy are distributed through multimodal resources and speaking rights, directive force, and evaluative framing. Finally, linguistic anchorage frequently narrowed the potential of visual meaning by naming relationships, guiding affective interpretation, and stabilizing how gender and belonging should be understood. The study contributes by treating togetherness as an empirically traceable multimodal script, by refining gender analysis through authority/agency rather than presence itself, and by specifying cross-modal interaction as a mechanism of meaning stabilization in intercultural brand discourse. Future research can expand the dataset across campaigns and periods and integrate reception methods to examine how viewers negotiate these relational and gendered scripts.

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