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The Pragmatic Study of the Relationship between Informativeness and Comprehensibility in Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract	Article History
<p>This research study explores the practical aspect of the connection between informativeness and comprehensibility of advertisements in Nigerian newspapers. Using the example of thirty purposely sampled adverts in <i>The Punch</i> and <i>The Nation</i> newspapers, the study uses the Cooperative Principle of Grice in determining the extent of information given and how well it is presented to the readers. Whereas informativeness deals with the adequateness and relevance of information, comprehensibility deals with the ease with which messages can be understood by the audience. The results indicate that Nigerian adverts often favour the persuasion and the aesthetic content more than the informative one, and political and educational advertisements offer very little information yet can be easily understood. Financial and real estate adverts, in turn, avoid excessiveness and ambiguity, as they provide necessary information in clear language. Health and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) advertisements usually violate the maxim of quality by trading accuracy in favor of persuasion. In general, the paper finds that comprehensibility does not guarantee informativeness and vice versa; the most useful adverts are the ones combining the two variables. This research would be of use to pragmatic scholarship by showing how the advertising discourse can negotiate between persuasion and clarity in the context of a multilingual society. In practice, it provides information to advertisers, publishers, and to regulators on how to enhance the communicative worth of print advertising in Nigeria.</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Pragmatics; informativeness; comprehensibility; Nigerian newspapers; advertising discourse; communication effectiveness</i></p>	<p>Received: 31 Aug 2025 Accepted: 09 Sept 2025 Published: 18 Sept 2025</p> <p>Scan QR code to view*</p>  <p>License: CC BY 4.0*</p>  <p>Open Access article.</p>
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1. Introduction

In Nigeria, newspapers play a crucial role in the dissemination of information, education, and persuasion, especially through advertisements. Advertising, being a linguistic type, flourishes on creativity and persuasion, but its communicative performance is based on two pragmatic variables, namely, informativeness and comprehensibility. Informativeness is the level of quantity and pertinence of information presented, e.g., price, features of a product, or availability, whereas comprehensibility is the degree to which a message can be understood by the reader. The success of advertising in the Nigerian context, where the readership represents a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, depends, in most cases, on the successful strike

of a balance between the two variables (Okoye, 2019; Usaini and Zubairu, 2021).

Despite the importance of both variables, Nigerian advertisements often reveal a gap between informativeness and comprehensibility. There are numerous adverts, which favor persuasion and creativity over freshness and clarity, and numerous adverts are plain and easy to remember but lack the details required to make the decision (Ayoola, 2013; Ezeifeke, 2020). For example, political slogans can be very understandable yet convey little information, and financial services advertisements can be understandable but with complicated wording that minimizes accessibility. This tension raises a pragmatic question: what relationship exists

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between informativeness and comprehensibility in Nigerian newspaper advertising?

The objective of this study is, therefore, to pragmatically analyze the degree to which advertisements in the Nigerian newspapers are informative and comprehensible. Specifically, the research is examining the question of whether informative adverts are also understandable, whether understandable adverts are informative enough, and the pragmatic strategies of the audience's interpretation. Using the Cooperative Principle by Grice and the conversational maxims as an analytical tool, this study offers insights into how Nigerian adverts negotiate between being persuasive and being communicatively effective.

This research is important because it has both practical and academic importance. The findings give advertisers and publishers a guideline in creating adverts that will be attractive and useful to consumers. The study presents the need for regulators to put in place regulations that will help to protect consumers by ensuring that there is no misleading or vague information. For an academic setting, the study extends pragmatic research into the Nigerian advertising landscape, linking linguistic theory to applied communication (Onuora, 2018; Musa, 2022). The scope of this research is limited to thirty advertisements purposively selected from two national newspapers—*The Punch* and *The Nation*—within three months. Analysis focuses on the linguistic aspects of text that influence informativeness and comprehensibility.

2. Literature Review

The landscape of Nigerian newspaper advertising is a complex combination of linguistic creativity, economic need, and socio-cultural diversity. Effective communication in this context does not only involve drawing attention but also communicating with the aim of passing on actionable information that would be easily received by a heterogeneous audience. This literature review summarizes the current studies on the main ideas of pragmatics, informativeness, and comprehensibility, and examines the links between them in a specific context of Nigerian print media.

Pragmatics, defined as the study of meaning in relation to context, speaker intention, and hearer interpretation (Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996), provides the essential theoretical foundation for this study. Pragmatics, in contrast to semantics, the subject of which is literal, context-free meaning, is a study of how language users derive meaning with reference to common knowledge, context, and cultural conventions (Afolayan, 2016). In advertising, this translates to how advertisers encode messages with intended meanings and how audiences decode them, often navigating figurative language, ambiguity, and cultural references (James, 2011). Pragmatic competence in the multilingual setting of Nigeria, where English is used as lingua franca among many indigenous languages, is an essential element in breaking the

possible communicative barrier (Afolayan, 2016; Ayoola, 2013).

Informativeness refers to the degree to which an advertisement provides adequate, relevant, and useful information necessary for consumer decision-making (Resnik and Stern, 1977). Key informational cues include price, quality, availability, usage instructions, and benefits (Abernathy and Franke, 1996; Robert, 2013). Studies have established that consumers feel that informative advertisements are more credible and that the information directly affects the level of purchasing behaviour (Abernathy and Franke, 1996). The price and quality disclosure is especially valued in the Nigerian context, where consumers face economic constraints as one of the key factors (Gidado, 2015). Advertisements devoid of these essential informational aspects are likely to make consumers alienated, no matter how well they have been creatively crafted.

Comprehensibility is a quality that determines how a target audience can comprehend a message (Barefoot et al., 1993). It is fashioned in advertising by the use of diction, sentence structure, figurative expressions and addition of visual imagery (Cook, 1989). The literacy level of Nigeria, which is claimed to be slightly above 62 percent among adults (World Bank, 2020), and its cultural and linguistic diversity pose a significant challenge to comprehensibility. Advertisements that use complicated terms, culturally isolated phrases, or vague slogans may exclude large segments of the population. Consequently, the simplest, clear, and context-related language is required to attain the enhancement of comprehensibility (Robert, 2013).

A balance between informative and comprehensible is the determinant of the performance of an advertisement (Robert, 2013). A highly informative advert cannot work when the message it contains cannot be accessed by its target audience. On the other hand, a very understandable advert that does not have substantive information does not prepare the consumer to make a decision. Pragmatics bridges the two notions with regard to how readers employ the contextual cues to make inferences where the conveyed information is not mentioned but implied through the use of language that is ambiguous (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996). However, when the inferred meaning diverges significantly from the advertiser's intent, communication fails.

The empirical literature on newspaper advertisements in Nigeria has repeatedly pointed out a conflict between creativity in style and clarity in communication. In an overview of pragmatic acts, Ayoola (2013) discovered that most adverts were convincing, but some of them were overly inadequate in terms of informativeness, and some of them ended up leaving out vital information, such as price. Gidado (2015) also commented that advertisements often presuppose a degree of common cultural understanding that marginalizes

a certain number of audience members, decreasing the level of understanding. These findings contrast with international studies that posit informativeness as the cornerstone of effective advertising (Resnik and Stern, 1977; Abernathy and Franke, 1996). The Nigerian reality is that the advertisers tend to emphasize on creative and convincing words, i.e. puns, neologisms, and figurative language (Goddard, 2001; Kennedy, 1995) at the possible expense of clarity and complete disclosure. This highlights the urgent necessity of a practical assessment that is able to determine not only what is available, but how the information is coded and to what extent it is likely to be decoded by the target audience.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative content analysis design where textual data were systematically interpreted through classification, coding, and pattern or theme identification (Krippendorff, 2013). The qualitative design was chosen because the research aims to interpret how the pragmatic features of informativeness and comprehensibility are manifested and interrelated in Nigerian newspaper advertisements, rather than to measure these variables quantitatively. The analysis is based on pragmatic theory, and the framework of Cooperative Principle developed by Grice (1975) is used to find the answer to the question of how language decisions may contribute to the preservation of the equilibrium between information provision and understanding.

The population sample for this study consisted of the advertisements published in two major Nigerian national daily newspapers – *The Punch* and *The Nation*. The Nigerian print media landscape is vibrant and serves as a crucial channel for commercial communication (Gidado, 2015). The two newspapers were selected to create a representative and diverse sample, based on their scope of circulation, national coverage, and editorial diversity. In-depth analysis of advertisements was carried out through a purposive sampling method. Such a non-probability sampling approach is typical of qualitative research when the objective is to identify cases that are informative of the phenomenon of interest and that can be considered information-rich (Creswell and Poth, 2018). A total of thirty (30) advertisements, published over a three-month period, were selected from the newspapers. The sample covered a range of sectors such as the banking, real estate, education, insurance, consumer goods and telecommunications sector to have a wide representation of the advertising strategies and challenges.

A structured content analysis checklist was used as the main tool of research, which was created according to the pragmatic theory and the previous literature (Resnik and Stern, 1977; Robert, 2013). The checklist was designed in

such a way that every advertisement would be coded in terms of two variable sets:

1. Informativeness Indicators: Presence of price, quality, availability, usage instructions, location/contact details, performance features, and guarantees.
2. Comprehensibility Indicators: Simplicity of diction, clarity of sentence structure, use of culturally appropriate figurative expressions, relevance of visuals and color, and use of proper names.

Data were collected by physically purchasing copies of *The Punch* and *The Nation* newspapers over the designated three-month period. Advertisements were clipped and compiled into a physical corpus. Both full-page and smaller advertisements were included, provided they contained sufficient textual and visual material for analysis. Data analysis followed a qualitative content analysis procedure with a pragmatic orientation. Each advertisement was systematically evaluated using the content analysis checklist. The core of the analysis involved:

- Assessing each advert's adherence to or violation of Grice's (1975) four conversational maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, Manner).
- Evaluating its level of informativeness based on the presence of the predefined informational cues.
- Evaluating its level of comprehensibility based on the linguistic and visual clarity indicators.
- Examining the relationship between the two variables, identifying patterns where informativeness enhanced or impeded comprehensibility and vice versa.

The results were presented descriptively, with sample adverts used as illustrative examples. A summary table (Table 1) was constructed to show the frequency and correlation between informativeness and comprehensibility across the sample.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the summary of the comprehensive pragmatic examination of 30 purposively selected advertisements from two major Nigerian newspapers: *The Punch* and *The Nation*. These adverts span sectors such as real estate, education, health supplements, banking, politics, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs). The informativeness is evaluated by the availability of major information indicators such as price, quality, availability, instructions, and performance information, as it allows the consumer to make wise choices. Comprehensibility, on the other hand, has to do with the ease with which the intended message can be decoded, and this can be due to the application of simple diction, figurative language, emotive language, proper names, colors, images, and the general listener/reader work effort.

Table 1: Summary of occurrence of maxims, informative/non-informative adverts, and comprehensible/non-comprehensible adverts.

Maxims/Adverts		Frequency	Percentage
Maxims	No Maxim	13	34%
	Quantity	5	13%
	Manner	11	29%
	Quality	5	13%
	Relation	4	11%
Informativeness	Informative	23	77%
	Not Informative	7	23%
Comprehensibility	Comprehensible	22	73%
	Not Comprehensible	8	27%
Informative /Comprehensible	Informative and Comprehensible	20	67%
	Informative but Not Comprehensible	4	13%
	Comprehensible but Not Informative	2	6%
	Not informative and Not Comprehensible	4	13%

From the data in Table 1, 23 of 30 ads (77 percent) are considered informative and contain enough information, such as interest rates in bank loans or advantages in educational enrollments. However, comprehensibility is achieved in 22 adverts (73%), often through accessible language and visuals, such as bold fonts, colorful highlights, and relevant images (e.g., a teenager in a UBA Teens Account ad). A strong correlation shows that 20 adverts (67%) are both informative and comprehensible, aligning with the notion that transparent structure enhances both variables. Conversely, 4 adverts (13%) are informative but not comprehensible due to ambiguous statements or unrelated visuals, while only 2 (6%) are comprehensible but lack informativeness, often relying on emotional appeals without factual depth.

This correlation is emphasized by sectoral differences with the most informativeness, such as finance and real estate, which provide information on terms and contacts and, thus, are more comprehensible (e.g., Bank Loan Advert in *The Punch* has all maxims observed). Emotional slogans are used in low-risk categories such as politics and FMCGs, where comprehensibility is achieved at the cost of informativeness. This pattern stresses the idea that not all comprehensible statements are informative because simple language tends to conceal informational gaps, whereas informative statements tend to increase comprehensibility by being well-structured. The relationship is further enhanced by cultural diversity, economic status, and advertising regulations in Nigeria, which is a multilingual country with English as *lingua franca*, but literacy is only around 62% (World Bank, 2020). Similar simple-diction and image adverts are appropriate to different literacy levels, increasing the level of understanding, whereas poor details can result in economic waste or distrust.

The analysis affirms that informativeness and comprehensibility are interrelated yet distinct pragmatic dimensions in Nigerian newspaper adverts, extending prior

assertions that pragmatic violations are intentional for persuasion (Grundy, 2000). A simple advertisement may be easy to decipher but offer little in the way of decision-making as in the case of educational and political adverts, which agree with Roberts (2013) on the contribution of structure to both. This is similar to the recent research conducted about the Nigerian advertisements; the semantic and language tools used in *The Punch* and Vanguard newspapers show a shift in favor of emotional appeal over factual content in consumer-focused industries (Ojo, 2025). Additionally, comprehensibility of adverts has been observed to increase in the digital media environment due to the concept of interactivity which reduces cognitive load which may enhance the informativeness relationship (Lee and Kim, 2025).

However, the 13% of adverts that are informative but incomprehensible imply a pragmatic trade-off: overloading details without clear visuals or diction can violate Manner maxim, leading to confusion in low-literacy audiences. This applies specifically to the case of Nigeria, where economic constraints make price informativeness one of the most desirable elements of consumption (Gidado, 2015), but the cultural depth implies the use of understandable emotive patterns. Recent pragmatic studies of media advertisements during world events, such as the COVID-19, show that semi-commercial messages tend to focus on urgency rather than clarity and reflect sectoral trends in this case (Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2023).

This research suggests that advertisers should focus more on the balance strategies: Be more informative in risk-sensitive areas and use more visuals for comprehensibility across all. With the changing media sector in Nigeria, where social media is gaining more influence, future advertisements might incorporate AI-generated texts to promote customized informational value, but this may continue to maximize cases of violation unless contextualized (Cotton et al., 2024). On

the whole, the positive correlation (67%) confirms the importance of pragmatics as the means of successful advertising yet requires a regulatory focus on consumer protection to curb the misleading implications.

4.1 Findings

The analysis of the 30 advertisements selected from *The Punch* and *The Nation* newspapers demonstrates that there are important insights on the practicality of the interplay of informativeness (delivery of useful information such as price, availability and features) and comprehensibility (ease of targeting readers through simple diction, illustrations and format). Based on the Cooperative Principle developed by Grice (1975), 23 out of 30 adverts (77%) were informative, providing enough cues for decision making, and 22 out of 30 the adverts (73%) were comprehensible, facilitated by such factors as bold fonts, colors, and emotional expressions. A strong correlation exists, with 20 adverts (67%) achieving informativeness and comprehensibility, particularly in financial and real estate sectors where detailed yet clear information (e.g., interest rates and requirements in bank loan adverts) enhances accessibility. Nevertheless, this correlation is not always linear: 4 adverts (13%) were informative but could not be understood because of ambiguous wording or unrelated images, and 2 (6%) were non-informative, based on slogans without any factual background (e.g., political and educational adverts). There are also sectoral differences: In high-risk industries such as finance, informativeness is more valued (structured information), which enhances comprehensibility, whereas in low-risk industries such as politics and FMCGs, emotional appeals are more favored, which leads to high comprehensibility (high scores in simple language) but low informativeness (violations of Quantity maxim by omission of profiles or prices). The situation in Nigeria, where literacy is estimated at around 62 percent (World Bank, 2020) and people are multilingual, means that such aspects as cultural references and level of economic status can affect the results, where insufficient informativeness results in consumer confusion or distrust, and low comprehensibility results in the exclusion of diverse audiences.

Conclusion

This pragmatic study highlights the fact that informativeness and comprehensibility are related but distinct with respect to Nigerian newspaper advertisements, and as such, pragmatics is a strong tool of analyzing performance. Comprehensibility provides a wide accessibility where informativeness provides information to provide value in making informed decisions but most adverts favour persuasions through a maxim violation to provide an implicature that may mislead rather than inform. The non-linear relationship between informativeness and comprehensibility provides

opportunities for balance, as seen in effective financial adverts, but calls for caution in diverse socio-linguistic settings where violations risk credibility. Finally, both dimensions should be incorporated by the advertisers so that intentions, matched by the audience interpretations, can be part of ethical advertisement in Nigeria which is a dynamic media environment.

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