

## **A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF VISUAL PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISEMENTS**

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### **Abstract**

Public service advertisement is advertisement that discuss social problems that occur in the community. Public service advertisements are designed in a multi-faceted manner in terms of concept, content, and also their meaning, to attract the attention of society. However, there are still many people who do not understand what the message is trying to convey from the advertisement. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the semiotic aspects of denotative and connotative meanings in visual public service advertisements. This study aims to identify and describe the denotative and connotative meanings contained in visual public service advertisements. This research applies qualitative method. The analysis of visual public service advertisements are using a semiotic theory by Roland Barthes, provides knowledge about everything that has a good and bad impact from a cause and effect. This knowledge is needed to be useful for people who want to achieve social welfare in their lives. Thus, the public can interpret the meaning and message of a visual public service advertisement properly and correctly.

*Keywords: Connotative meaning, Denotative meaning, Public service advertisement, Semiotic.*

### **Introduction**

Language is needed by living things as social beings. This means that there is no language, so no activities can be realized properly without a communication process in any context. The communication system can be in the form of oral or written. Liliweri(1991: 20) argues that, “the act of communication is the creation of individual interactions through clear signs.” Therefore, communication is also synonymous with semiotics. Where the delivery of messages through the process of the communicator delivered to the communicant. The process is in the form of messages conveyed through the symbols given by the communicator and then will be interpreted by the communicant through a thought process. In addition, a person who communicates with others in it contains expressions, gestures, and the words he speaks, all of which have implied signs and meanings. So what we do, what we see, what we feel, and what we hear all contain semiotic elements in it. Communication is never separated from visual and verbal. Visual is marked by pictures, verbal is marked by spoken and written words. The relationship between visual and verbal is very close. If there is only one visual or verbal communication, the communication will continue, but understanding of the communication is limited. Likewise with communication, there are two things in communication (visual and verbal), then the level of understanding will be much better at understanding the information obtained.

Advertising is one of the media that makes it easy for someone to introduce, promote, and market a product, both goods and services. It is also a form of communication activity of a person to the whole community. To market a product, a strategy is needed as a marketing logic design that can be used by business people to achieve marketing goals (Kotler, 1991: 416). How to expand the function in advertising through naming the meaning of symbols using visual language in the advertising message conveyed. Media channels used to deliver advertisements are print media (newspapers, magazines, posters, leaflets, brochures, billboards, and billboards) and electronic media (radio, television, films). Visual elements (images and colors) and verbal elements are weapons used in print media. Advertisements must be designed with

multiple aspects in all fields, both from images and writing that are related to each other. In order to attract the attention or the response of the community and can be accepted by them.

Visual public service advertising is a moral education-based advertising activation. Visual public service advertisements have an element of noble duty that aims to improve people's lives through messages that are packaged neatly, creatively, and innovatively, as well as symbolic so that they are easy to understand. But there are elements who are not responsible for exaggerating the context of the message that has been strung together in detail. This can make people misinterpret the advertisement. Public service advertisements are dedicated to educating the public about things that are compelling views to govern visually. So that people who are the main target of visual public service advertisements are indifferent and do not care about the social messages contained in these advertisements. It would be a waste to convey.

## 2. Semiotic

The study of semiotic was originally introduced in 1916 by a linguist named Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure, as the father of modern linguistics, asserts that semiology has a huge impact to discover what denotes the signs and how the signs are determined (Saussure, 1966, p.16). The term semiotics has been very often introduced by experts. But according to Mayr (2013), semiotics (often also referred to as 'semiology') comes from the Greek word semeion which means 'sign'. It is a study of signs and symbols focused on words, any communicative element from pictures to hairstyles counts as a sign.

For this reason, the author argues that semiotics is the study of the meaning of signs that make it easier for a person to collect and provide a lot of information and communicate through existing signs. Therefore semiotics is a science or analytical method used to study signs. Basically, humans learn things to make sense of things through the study of semiotics. A structured sign system has an interpretation which means that the object not only carries information but the object wants to be communicated (Sobur, 2009:15).

As it is known that semiotics as a scientific discipline, semiotics is the study of signs which contain meaning. In Saussurean terminology, signs can be classified into signifiers and signifieds. One of the signs in semiotics is a visual sign. Visual signs consist of pictures, advertisements, paintings, and photographs. In addition to visual signs, voice signs are also signs of semiotics, which are words and body movements. Language, images, objects are representations as well as the focus of semiotics. Where these three things produce meaning or the process by which we understand or associate meaning.

Representation not only shows the world but is also an interaction between a person and the world. This interaction can be accompanied by text or not and then becomes a recognizable text (paintings, posters, magazines, etc.) (Jewitt, 2004). In semiotics, a clearer meaning is a visual sign than a language (verbal sign), making it easier for the public to understand the message in the visual public service advertisement. When Barthes developed the theory of semiotics from linguistics into visual images, such as photography, advertisements, and films, the application of semiotics became even greater.

In the field of semiotics, there are three philosophers, namely Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Roland Barthes. Charles S. Pierce (1986: 4), defines semiotics as logic, namely "which focuses on signs"; Meanwhile, for Ferdinand de Saussure (1996:16), semiology is the study of the life of signs in society. So, for Pierce semiotics is a branch of philosophy; Meanwhile, for Saussure, semiology is a part of social psychology. Roland Barthes states that Semiology as visual communication, which aims to accept any sign system as to what its substance and boundaries are; images, gestures, musical sounds, and objects.' (Barthes, 1968). The third semiotic philosophy says that semiotics is concerned with signs that have implied meanings in them.

### 3. Public service advertisement

According to Leech(1966:25), advertisement is a means of communication which tries to persuade people or tell people about certain product, job or service and it can take the form of a notice, picture, text, film, song, or combination of all. Advertising, beside

used as a marketing activity, its also could be used as acommunication activity. A marketing activity consist by a marketing strategy, that could be cover as marketing logic that can be use by business unit to reach the marketing purposes(Kotler, 1991:416).

Visual communication design, one of which is in the form of advertisements, means that it can be understood as an effort to solve problems (communication, or visual communication) to produce the newest advertising design among the newest advertising designs(Tinarbuko, 2009: 66). In this context, the emphasis is focused on how to solve communication problems both verbally and visually by putting forward the latest design as "the commander of war". The design of an advertisement is a system of fulfilling human needs in the field of technology as well as verbal and visual information through visible symbols which are experiencing very rapid development. In almost all sectors of human daily activities, visual symbols are present in the form of images, sign systems to displays in various places, be it in shopping centers, on highways, and so on, with all their Public service advertisements are advertisements that are used for convey information, invite or educate audiences where the ultimate goal is not economic gain, but social gain. These social benefits include the emergence of increased knowledge, awareness of attitudes and changes in behavior to the problems that are advertised where all the benefits are very important for the quality of life of the community Itself". just like commercial advertisements in general, public service advertisements also have the same principles in their design. Advertising is a form of persuasive message that plays an important role in conveying the aims and objectives of a company. Therefore, the most important thing in creating a public service advertisements strategy is to create persuasive communication that can influence target consumers to change their behavior and habits according to the wishes of the ad sign. This is the comparison of commercial advertisements and public service advertisements.

### **Method**

Researchers present the steps of analyzing their data.

In this journal, the author used qualitative methods to help the authors collect data and be able to analyze data in depth. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach, meaning that qualitative researchers study the things they experience, try to understand, or to interpret, phenomena in the sense that people bring them to them. The goal is that the analysis focuses on the data that has been found, but not on general studies.

In addition, to describe and interpret the results of the analysis of this study as well as to explain visual and verbal signs based on the meaning of denotation, and the meaning of connotation in visual public service advertisements, a qualitative method is very suitable for use in this study.

Analysis of public service advertisements with semiotic studies based on:

- Semiotics Charles Sanders Pierce (verbal, and non-verbal communication). Then the author interpret the meaning which consists of framing technique and communicative act.
- Semiotics Roland Barthes (Denotative meaning and connotative meaning).

According to some interpreters, the sign as a thing that stands for something else and is the most important building structure of the study of semiotics (Peirce, 1932). The object of this journal focuses on the image on the poster to be analyzed. Therefore, the researcher's first step to analyze the poster is to identify the signs contained in the image, which consists of verbal and nonverbal communication. Then the researcher identified nonverbal communication systems based on framing techniques and communicative acts. In fine arts, framing techniques can be defined as the presentation of visual aspects in an image, especially those that are interconnected with other objects. While in linguistics, communicative acts function as a form of communication which is in the form of words that explain an action contained in the poster (verbal communication).

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was the first to have an application of the idea of semiotics, which evolved into the earlier visual images of linguistics. To analyze the signs of visual objects, Barthes uses denotative and connotative meanings known as 'levels of meaning'. As for the types of signs according to Barthes, which distinguishes

the analysis of signs into two, namely verbal and nonverbal signs. Verbal cues are the text found on the poster, such as title, actor name, movie release date and more. While non-verbal signs are visualization images found on posters that support verbal signs so that the poster is attractive as an advertising package.

Barthes uses theory order of signification, where there is the denotative and connotative 'levels of meanings' to analyze the signs in visual object. Barthes' idea known as the order of signification, includes denotation(dictionary meaning) and connotation(second meaning by cultural and personal experience). This is where the difference between Saussure and Barthes lies even though Barthes still uses the term signifier-signified that Saussure brought up. The first order of signification(denotation) is seen as primarily representational and relatively independent. Barthes(1967: 91) defines, connotation is the second order of signification comprises signifiers, signified. In the framework of Roland Barthes, the connotation is a sign which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign(so denotation leads to a chain of connotation).

Whereas denotation is the precise, literal definition of a word that might be found in a dictionary. It describes the literal or obvious meaning of the sign. Thus, denotation of the visual image refers to what all people see without association to their culture, ideology or society. Barthes(1913-1980) mention that, denotation is an object placed within media texts. It is then up to the audience to draw on their own cultural, social and historical knowledge to interpret its connotation.

### **Findings**

As for the types of signs according to Barthes, which distinguishes the analysis of signs into two, namely verbal and nonverbal signs. Verbal cues are the text found on the poster, While non-verbal signs are visualization images found on posters that support verbal signs so that the poster is attractive as an advertising package. Barthes theory uses denotative and connotative meanings in visual public service



advertisements. Denotation and connotation are processes of sign elements which are then understood through meaning.

In this chapter, the researcher wants to describe the visual and verbal signs of alcohol and cigarette's public service advertisement. In the advertisement there are visual signs that are manifested in the form of images or anything that supports verbal signs, both denotative and connotative meanings of the sign.

Meanwhile, verbal signs are explored in the form of text. Furthermore, the researchers looked for verbal and visual signs in visual public service advertisements and then analyzed them using the denotative and connotative meanings contained in the posters for analysis. In addition, the description of the analysis will be explained in the data analysis. Finally, the researcher found the denotative and connotative meanings of signs in advertisements according to the theory of order signification from Roland Barthes.

a. Data Analysis of "Alcohol's visual public service advertisement" the dangerous of drinking

Pictures 1 The dangerous of drinking

<https://sites.psu.edu/sycrcl/2015/10/12/rhetorical-analysis-essay-artifacts/>

The poster above is about alcohol's visual public service advertisement alcohol drunk. This alcohol's visual public service advertisement was published in 2015. The poster above illustrates the face and hand of a person where on his face there is a red car image and on his hand, there is a green car image. Then on the poster, there is verbal word "Stop the violence" and "Don't drive and drink".

1. Verbal Sign

- Stop the violence
- Don't drink and drive

Verbal sign analysis in Alcohol's visual public service advertisement represent denotative and connotative meanings and explained in below:

a. Stop the violence



Denotative meaning : This verbal invites us to don't do violence to anyone.

Connotative meaning : This sentence tells us that violence is dangerous and has a bad impact on ourselves and others, that's why the designer made this poster. So that we don't do the violence.

b. Don't drink and drive

Denotative meaning : This verbal word reminds us to don't drink (alcohol) while we are driving a vehicle.

Connotative meaning : This sentence means that when we drink (alcohol) while we are driving a car, we can trigger an accident. Because when we are drinking which made us drunk then we will lose our consciousness. Whatever we do while we are drunk, it must be subconsciously. That's why this poster forbids us to drink while driving a vehicle.

2. Visual Sign

- Red car
- Green car
- Someone's hand
- Someone's face

Visual sign analysis in Alcohol's visual public service advertisement represents denotative and connotative meanings and explained in below:

a. Red car

Denotative meaning : One of transportations that has a red colour.

Connotative meaning : The red car on this poster symbolizes the red light on the traffic light. Because when someone is driving a vehicle on the street then he/she will find a traffic light. One of the lights is red. The red color on the traffic light means stop.

b. Green car

Denotative meaning : One of transportations that has a green colour.

Connotative meaning : The green car on this poster symbolizes the green light on the traffic light. Because when someone is driving a vehicle on the street then he will find a traffic light. In addition to red, traffic lights have another color, the color is green. The green color at the traffic light means can go.

c. Someone's Hand

Denotative meaning : One part of the human body that is located from the elbow to the tip of the finger or from the wrist to the tip of the finger.

Connotative meaning : The next visual image is a hand drawing which illustrates that when someone drives a vehicle, they use their hands. It means that every event that occurs when we are driving a vehicle then it happens because of humans themselves.

d. Someone's Face

Denotative meaning : One part of the human body that is located at the front of the head.

Connotative meaning : The image of a person's face symbolizes that this is related to humans. It means that whatever will happen, it is related to humans.

From the explanation above, denotative meaning is the exact original definition of a word which is usually found in dictionaries. Which is the true meaning of the word is not derived from subjective judgment, this is what is called the first level of signification. Because the meaning of the word is already listed in the dictionary, it is not called a subjective judgment. Therefore, the explanation in the table above is about denotative meaning. The author explains it using the meanings listed in the dictionary. So that it is more objective and the data is more accurate.

And for the connotative meaning, discuss what is meant by the illustration on the poster. Therefore, the connotative meaning is a description or view of someone about the poster being discussed, which refers to the various positive and negative assumptions that most words carry by nature and the second level of the signification.

In the advertisements illustrate the someone's face in pain and there is also a red car on the face and a person's hand punching someone's face and looks in pain where there is an image of a green car on the hand. In addition to the image, the advertisements have the verbal words that said "stop violence" That is, if a person was drunk, he can do violence against others and himself. Therefore, we will do those things that harm ourselves and others. WHO reported that, "A significant proportion of the disease burden attributable to alcohol consumption arises from unintentional and intentional injuries, including those due to road traffic crashes, violence, and

suicides, and fatal alcohol-related injuries tend to occur in relatively younger age groups". while the other verbal words "don't drink while driving". This means that when someone who is driving a vehicle is drunk, then they will have an accident. Because when we are drunk we will lose consciousness while doing something. According to The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) says, "alcohol interferes with a person's coordination, driving skills and judgment. Drinking can cause people to lose control and become aggressive, which can in turn affect driving skills". After identifying the signs found in the data, then interpreting the meaning through three steps:

- The first step is analyzing non-verbal communication. In the poster above there is a picture of a face and hands where on the face there is a picture of a green car and on the drawing of a person's hand there is also a red car which is the main object. The image of a red car and a green car is likened to a traffic light. It means that this poster depicts that when a person is driving with a car, when the traffic light is red and the traffic light is green, which means stop and go. When one of them violates the traffic light then the two cars will meet and an accident occurs. So the visual signs contained in this poster are never to drink intoxicating drinks when we are driving a vehicle. Because there will be a lot of bad things that will happen to us and others that can even cause death.

The next step is analyzing the framing technique. The frame takes a picture of a person's face and hand where on the hand there is a red car image, then on the person's face image there is also a green car image.

The last step is analyzing the communicative action. The verbal signs contained in the visual public service advertisements. The image in the poster above is an illustration of the sentence on the poster. the sentences are "stop violence" and "don't drive and drink". Both sentences are statements that emphasize that you should never drive a car when you are drunk. Because there will be many things that we do not want can happen. Because when we are drunk we can lose consciousness. Besides being able to endanger ourselves, we can also endanger someone's life when we

drive a car while drunk. In addition, the message of this poster is to invite people don't drink when we are driving a vehicle because it will be dangerous for us and others.

b. Data Analysis of "Cigarette's visual public service advertisement" smoking kills

Picture 2 Smoking kills

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/289848926004601312/>

This poster is cigarette's visual public service advertisement. This poster illustrates someone's hand are holding a cigarette, besides that the hand has a shadow where the hand are holding a cigarette turns into holding a gun. In the illustration, the poster's designer are added the words "Smoking kills" and "About 106,000 people in the UK die every year from smoking". This poster tells the bad impact that will happen if we consume cigarettes. Based on data analysis, the researcher found visual and verbal signs.

1. Verbal Sign

- Smoking kills
- About 106,000 people in the UK die each year due to smoking

Verbal sign analysis in Cigarette's visual public service advertisement represents denotative and connotative meanings and explained in below:

a. Smoking kills

Denotative meaning : This verbal sign has the meaning that cigarettes can kill someone. Which the person who consumes cigarettes.

Connotative meaning : This sentence illustrates that we should never consume cigarettes. Because smoking can kill us. So this poster conveys a message for us to stay away from cigarettes.

b. About 106,000 people in the UK die each year due to smoking

Denotative meaning : This sentence is an information that tells many victims died because of smoking. Although the information is in the English city. But the person who designed this poster has the aim to inform the public that smoking is harmful to our health.

Connotative meaning : With this sentence, it means we have to think again if we want to consume cigarettes. Because, this sentence is also proof that smoking will have a very dangerous impact on our health.

2. Visual Sign

- Cigarette
- Someone's hand
- Gun

Visual sign analysis in Cigarette's visual public service advertisements represent denotative and connotative meanings and explained in below:

a. Cigarette

Denotative meaning : Tobacco roll (about the size of a pinkie) wrapped (nipah leaf, paper).

Connotative meaning : This visual image shows that this poster discusses about the problem is caused by smoking.

b. Someone's hand

Denotative meaning: One part of the human body that is located from the elbow to the tip of the finger or from the wrist to the tip of the finger.

Connotative meaning : On the poster above is a person's hand. It means the activity that has on the poster is done by human.

c. Gun

Denotative meaning : Short and small handgun.

Connotative meaning : This gun is a dangerous tool to use. Because this tool can kills someone. Cigarette is illustrated with a gun, it means cigarettes can kill us.

From the explanation above, denotative meaning is the exact original definition of a word which is usually found in dictionaries. Which is the true meaning of the word is not derived from subjective judgment, this is what is called the first level of signification. Because the meaning of the word is already listed in the dictionary, it is not called a subjective judgment. Therefore, the explanation in the table above is about denotative meaning. The author explains it using the meanings listed in the dictionary. So that it is more objective and the data is more accurate.

And for the connotative meaning, discuss what is meant by the illustration on the poster. Therefore, the connotative meaning is a description or view of someone about the poster being discussed, which refers to the various positive and negative assumptions that most words carry by nature and the second level of the signification. This poster illustrates someone's hand are holding a cigarette, besides that the hand has a shadow where the hand are holding a cigarette turns into holding a gun. In the illustration, the poster designer added the verbal words. The first verbal is "Smoking kills" In this verbal word, it means that cigarettes can kill someone who are consume it. Because in cigarettes there are the dangerous substances to the body. A 'premature death from smoking' is defined as a death from a smoking-related disease in an individual who would otherwise have died later from another cause. On average, these premature deaths involve 10 years of life years lost(US Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). And "About 106,000 people in the UK die every year from smoking". Based on the previous verbal word, the word is an information that the poster's designer wants to convey the public so the public knows about cigarettes that can kill him. Therefore, the poster's designer wants to invite people to stay away from cigarettes and don't consume them again.

After identifying the signs found in the data, then interpreting the meaning through three steps:

- The first step is analyzing non-verbal communication. In the poster above, there is a picture of someone's hand are holding a cigarette, besides that the hand has a shadow where the hand are holding a cigarette turns into holding a gun. So the visual signs on the poster symbolize the cigarette can turn into guns that will be killed us when we are consuming cigarette, try once or use them regularly.

The next step is analyzing the framing technique. The frame has a picture of a someone's hand are holding a cigarette, then in the hand has a shadow where someone's hand is holding a gun.

The last step is analyzing the communicative action. The verbal signs contained in this visual public service advertisement are an explanation of sentences on the poster.

The verbal words are "Smoking kills" and "About 106,000 people in the UK die each year due to smoking". Both sentences are the statements emphasize that we must stay away from cigarette, because cigarette can kill us. In addition, when we consume cigarette, it can be bad for our health. The message of this poster is to invite the society to never consume cigarette because cigarette can kill us.

Based on the results of the analysis, data obtained from 7 visual signs and 4 verbal signs from complete visual public service advertisements, cigarettes' visual public service advertisements, and alcohols' visual public service advertisements. The dominant sign is a visual sign. The signs were analyzed using the theory of Barthes' order of signification. The first data analysis of visual cigarette public service advertisements found 2 verbal signs and 4 visual signs. And the third data analysis of cigarette's visual public service advertisements found 2 verbal signs and 3 visual signs.

### **Discussion**

After analyzing alcohol warning's public service advertisements, the researcher concluded several points. They are:

1. First, the researcher found that the signs contained in the visual of public service advertisements were verbal signs and visual signs. Then the researcher found the denotative meaning and connotative meaning that the writer chose to use both of these meanings because the visual of the public service advertisement had important information that the writer wanted to convey to the reader. The denotative meaning and connotative meaning represent the meaning of the image on the poster.

In Data Analysis of "Alcohol's visual public service advertisement" the dangerous of drinking. The author got:

Denotative meaning : Red car, green car, someone's hand, someone's face

Connotative meaning : The symbolized of the red light and the green light on the traffic light, every event that was happened it caused by human, it's all about humans.

The interpretation of this poster:

Non-verbal communication : The visual signs contained in this poster are never to drink intoxicating drinks when we are driving a vehicle. Because there will be a lot of bad things that will happen to us and others that can even cause death.



The framing techniques : The frame takes a picture of a person's face and hand where on the hand there is a red car image, then on the person's face image there is also a green car image.

The communicative action : The image in the poster above is an illustration of the sentence on the poster. the verbal words are "stop violence" and "don't drive and drink". Both sentences are statements that emphasize that you should never drive a car when you are drunk. Because there will be many things that we do not want can happen. Because when we are drunk we can lose consciousness. Besides being able to endanger ourselves, we can also endanger someone's life when we drive a car while drunk.

In this poster, the poster is about the dangerous of alcohol and drink when we are driving.

2. The meaning of visual public service advertisements above is analyzed based on verbal signs and visual signs. After that, the writer analyzed the denotative and connotative meanings. To interpret these posters what is needed is nonverbal communication, framing techniques, and communicative acts. Non-verbal communication is identified based on the illustrations on the posters. The framing technique was analyzed based on what the picture showed, and communicative acts were analyzed based on the verbal signs found in the visual of public service advertisements.

Concerning the suggestion, the researcher hope that study for this visual public service advertisements recommended to get more data and references, so that this study has more accurate data results in completing the research.

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