

UNCOVERING IMPLIED MESSAGES IN BURGER KING ADVERTISEMENT: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Most people are required to stay at home to prevent the spreading of the coronavirus this pandemic and they could not do their routine which leads them to seek for entertainments to reduce their boredom, such as watching TV, film, YouTube, and other media. Burger King is one of the multinational chains that used video as their advertisement related to the COVID-19 pandemic that uses weird and eccentric verbal and visual signs, which not easy to understand and carried implied messages. This study aims to find out the implied messages in Burger King Advertisement found on YouTube by analyzing its verbal and visual signs. The data was taken from Burger King YouTube channel using the observation method. Furthermore, it analyzed the descriptive qualitative method using the theory of semiology by Saussure (1959), theory of meaning by Barthes (1977), and theory of color by Wierzbicka (1996). The finding shows that both verbal and visual signs in the advertisement “Burger King | Stay Home of the Whopper” have hidden messages. There were 9 verbal and visual signs and 8 denotative and 14 connotative meanings found in this study. Generally, they want to help the government stop the spreading of the COVID-19 virus by informing and educating their viewers about current procedures and situations to keep themselves safe and avoid the virus infection. Furthermore, the attractive video advertisement was used to entertain the consumer during the pandemic, to promote their product, and persuade the consumer to buy their product by highlighting the interesting promo.

Keywords: verbal signs, visual signs, advertisement, burger king.

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INTRODUCTION

During COVID-19 Pandemic, many people are required to stay at home to prevent the spreading of the coronavirus. Moreover, the government has instructed the citizen to prioritize smart working and studying. In other words, working and studying from home is mandatory for everyone (Cirrincione et al., 2020; Suryaman et al., 2020). Therefore, they could not do their normal routine which leads them to seek entertainment to reduce their boredom, such as watching TV, film, YouTube, and other media.

Advertising is a communication of marketing that used a message through visual and audio to sell or promote the product,

service, or idea. The term “advertising” means drawing attention, or notifying, or informing somebody of something (Dyer, 1982). Therefore, when the advertiser wants to attract people to one product, they persuade someone to buy and use that product or service, furthermore, the advertising media is the most appropriate media to use. There are many kinds of advertising media; they are press media, direct or mail advertising, outdoor or mural media, video, and others (Rahman et al., 2019; Tavor, 2011).

Video is an electronic medium for the recording, copying, playback, broadcasting, and display of moving visual media. YouTube is one of the electronic media that displaying videos

that are uploaded by its users. Nowadays, many people access this platform to seek entertainment. Therefore, Burger King took an initiative to create a YouTube channel to advertise their products as YouTube has been accessed a lot and it attracts a large number of internet users (Amalia & Satvikadewi, 2020).

Burger King is one of the multinational chains that used video as their strategy of communicating and marketing. The reason why the Burger King advertisement was chosen as the data source is that this advertisement is peculiar and interesting since it does not only try to persuade people to buy the product but also delivers important messages to the public related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It uses weird and eccentric verbal and visual signs which are not easy to understand and carried implied messages. Both verbal and visual signs are used in advertisements to attract consumer as it has aesthetic elements, which is believed to persuade the consumer to purchase and use the products and/or services (Bakar et al., 2015; Negm & Tantawi, 2015).

A sign is the composition of a signifier and signified (Saussure, 1959). A signifier is a form that the sign takes, meanwhile a signified is the concept of verbal and non-verbal. The verbal sign is used to communicate, either spoken or written. It contains conventionalized linguistic symbols such as words, phrases, and sentences that tell us the idea or feeling to other people. On the other hand, the visual sign is how we conveying the meaning without saying a word. As a social creature and part of society, people often use symbols in order to understand the functions of its interaction (Theresia et al., 2019). Dyer (1982: 120) stated that many advertisements used color as an objective correlative were the color of the product, a packet of cigarettes, a cosmetic range, etc. There are a lot of things that used verbal and visual signs to make a communication, such as social campaigns, book covers, and advertisements.

In Fiske (1990), Barthes's semiotic theory is known as two orders of signification. A process that binds the signifier is known as the signification and signified of the sign. Signification systems are divided into two, they

are arbitrary and motivated. The relation between signifier and signified which formed unilateral decisions is known as arbitrary signification, which means there is no natural relationship between a word and the object it refers to. On the other hand, motivated signification is the analogical relation or the relation is in their nature.

The signification is divided into two steps they are; the first order of signification and the second order of signification. The first order of signification is to represent the relation between the signifier and signified of sign. Barthes called the first order of signification a denotation, which refers to the obvious meaning of the sign. Meanwhile, connotation describes the relationship of the sign related to the feelings or emotions of the user and their cultural values (Barthes, 1977).

Three previous studies discussed signs from an advertisement. The studies were conducted by Fizziela (2015), Kartika et al (2017), and Komala (2013). These studies found verbal and visual signs within the advertisements which the objectives not only aim to attract the consumers but also have hidden meaning within every sign. The studies above discussed and analyzed the sign and the meaning it. Although they discussed the same topic, there are several differences among the studies. The study conducted by Kartika et al (2016) discussed service advertisement by using video as the data source. Meanwhile, both studies conducted by Komala (2013) and Fizziela (2015) discussed products, such as fragrance and shoes with the poster as their data sources. On the other hand, the current study discussed a food advertisement by using video.

This study aims to uncover the implied messages of the verbal and visual signs found in the Burger King advertisement. In analyzing the advertisement, the writer used the theory of semiology by Saussure (1959) to find out the verbal and visual signs and then used the theory supposed by Barthes (1977) to find the meaning of those signs. The significance of the study is to have the customer understand more about the meaning contained in Burger King Advertisement.

METHOD

In conducting this study, the data were taken from Burger King YouTube channel entitled “Burger King | Stay Home of the Whopper”. The data were collected by observation method and note-taking technique. The observation method was applied in this study by watching audiovisual advertisements carefully. There were four steps to collecting the data. Those steps were downloading the

advertisement on the internet (YouTube) through this link <https://youtu.be/IsQ7Wto0FJg>, watching the advertisements carefully to observe the data in Burger King advertisement, taking note of the verbal and visual signs found in Burger King advertisements, and the last one was classifying the data based on the signs that showed in both signifiers and signified, and connotation and denotation. The research design of this study can be seen in figure 1.

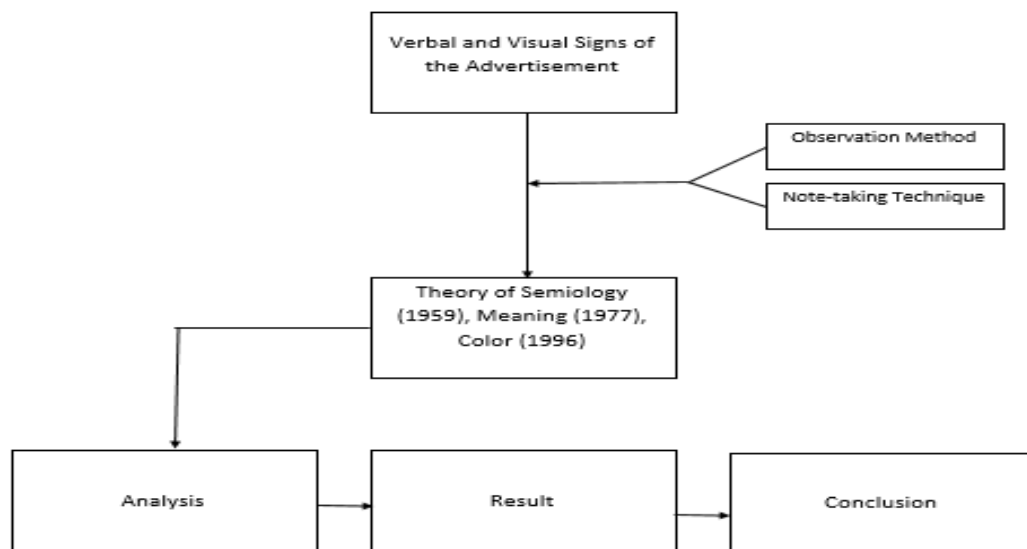


Figure 1. Research Design

The data were collected by using observation and note-taking method. In applying the theory used in this study, the collected data were thoroughly analyzed by applying the qualitative method. The verbal and the visual signs from the advertisement were then analyzed by using the theory of semiology proposed by Saussure (1959) to analyze the verbal and visual signs. To uncover the meaning behind the verbal and visual signs, the theory of meaning by Barthes (1977) was applied in order to describe the meaning and the intention of the message delivered within the advertisement. The theory of color terms by Wierzbicka (1996) was also used to reveal the meaning of colors used in the advertisement and to support Barthes’ theory. The results of this study were **Table 1.**

Verbal and Visual Signs in Burger King’s Advertisement

then identified by matching them with the theories applied in this study. In order to complete the study, a conclusion was drawn to briefly explain the implied meanings in the advertisement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The advertisement was taken from YouTube and analyzed based on the Semiology theory by Saussure (1959) also the theory of meaning by Barthes (1977) and supported by the color terms theory by Wierzbicka (1996). The objective of this study is to analyze and uncover the implied message of the advertisement. The finding presented as follows:

NO	ADVERTISEMENT	OCCURRENCES OF VERBAL SIGNS	OCCURRENCES OF VISUAL SIGNS
1.	Burger King Stay Home of the Whopper	9	9
Total		9	9

This study found 9 verbal and visual signs in the advertisement. The number of verbal and visual signs in the advertisement was

the same because the company wants the customers to get the messages or purposes that wanted to be delivered.

Table 2.
The Meaning of Verbal and Visual Signs in Burger King Advertisements

NO	ADVERTISEMENT	DENOTATIVE MEANING	CONNOTATIVE MEANING
1.	Burger King Stay Home of the Whopper	8	14
Total		8	14

The meaning of verbal and visual signs that were found in Burger King’s audiovisual advertisement is divided into two; denotative and connotative meanings. There are 8 denotations and 14 connotation meanings. This study found the connotation meaning is more dominant than the denotation meaning because the advertisement used more hidden meaning to convey the message for the customer rather than using the real meaning.

The Burger King audiovisual advertisement entitled “Burger King | Stay Home of the Whopper” was released on April 09, 2020, on their *YouTube* channel. The 31-second-video generally about the people who are stuck at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Burger King offers free delivery service to the customers, so they do not need to go out and risk their health and safety. The analysis of each verbal and visual sign can be seen in the following discussion.

Datum 1:



Figure 1. Visual Signs on Datum 1

Verbal signs on datum 1

The verbal sign is the most common sign used in communication, either through spoken or written text. The first spoken verbal sign in this advertisement is “Your country needs you to stay on your couch”. Through that signifier, the company is telling the audiences to sit or sleep on their couch, which signified that Burger King is inviting their viewers to stay in their house to make them and everyone safer from the pandemic era of COVID-19. This statement has connotative meaning. Connotative is the hidden meaning of the words. This statement is

connotative because, from that statement, the company wants to help the government to tell the people that in this era of COVID-19 it is better to stay home to make everyone protected from the virus. This means that the statement is not to be taken literally, but it has the intention to educate the audiences about how they can prevent the spreading of the COVID-19 virus during this situation.

The second statement is “and order in”. It is connected with the first statement of “your country needs you to stay on your couch”. The signifier is the company that tells the audience to order their product. The signified is that when you stay in your house, you do not need to worry about how to get food, the thing that you need to do is just grab your phone, and then you can get food without leaving your house. This statement is categorized into connotative and denotative meanings. Because this statement is not only saying the word “order” itself, which has the meaning of “buy it” in the denotative meaning. In addition, it has hidden meaning, which is the company persuade the viewers to buy their products. If you order from your house you do not need to go outside and avoid the spreading of the COVID-19 virus.

The last spoken verbal sign in this data is “do your part, and we’ll do ours”. That signified everyone has tasks in their lives same as the customers and the company, especially in this era of COVID-19 that many people asked to stay in their house to reduce the spread of the virus. Through this statement, Burger King wants to tell their customers to do their part, which is to stay at home, and then Burger King will do their part by delivering food to the customer’s house. This statement is categorized into denotative and also connotative meanings. Denotatively the statement tells the people to do their task, which is to stay at home. Moreover, the hidden meaning is to keep the people away from the virus and keep healthy in their house.

Visual signs on datum 1

The signifier of the first visual sign is a person who is laying on the soft-looking couch while looking at the phone, which signified a

person feels comfortable staying at home and still able to do many things using the phone. The connotative meaning that can be drawn in this image is staying at home is not as bad as people think. While staying at home people can do many things by their phone. Especially in this advertisement, the man can order food without leaving the house just using his phone instead. It makes him safe from the virus of COVID-19 and prevents the virus.

As can be seen from the man’s expression, he was smiling while nodding his head which means that he agreed with the statement “and order in” which support the verbal sign in the advertisement, so that it will influence the viewers to buy the products.

The next visual sign is a signifier as presented by the color used in this advertisement. The type of color is close to the brown tone, brown is categorized as the warm color tone that signified the steadfastness, homeliness, friendliness, firmness, and soundness feeling. It intended the advertisement wants to tell the audiences that they need to stay home because of the pandemic.

Compared to the previous study by Fizziela (2015), there is a significant difference that can be seen. The study by Fizziela found that visual signs were more highlighted than the verbal signs, while this study found the same amount of verbal and visual signs from the advertisement. This was because the previous study analyzed a magazine entitled “DETAILS”. The difference was due to the magazine focused on simplicity and visuals, while this study analyzed a video, in which the delivering of the information was balanced between verbal and visual elements. The similarities from both of these studies used interesting and catchy verbal and visual signs to deliver an information and also to persuade consumer to buy the products. From both results, it can be seen that verbal and visual signs successfully deliver the meaning on both advertisements to the viewers.

Datum 2:



Figure 2. Visual Signs on Datum 2

Verbal signs on datum 2

The first spoken verbal sign from the data above is “order through Burger King App, and the delivery fees are on us”. The signifier of the data is if you order from Burger King App, they will pay the delivery fees for the customer. While it signified the customer will get free delivery when they order through Burger King Apps. This statement is categorized as a denotative meaning because the meaning of the statement very obvious.

The second spoken verbal sign in this data is “so staying home doesn’t just make us all safer, it makes you a couch po-ta- triots”. This statement means that when you stay home is not only safe but it is also can make you become a po-ta-triots (potatriots) in your country. That statement signified that during the pandemic era of COVID-19 the people are asked by the government to stay home to make all safe from the virus and it makes the people become couch potatriots. Potatriots are combined words of “potato” which is slang, means someone uninteresting, dull, ugly, or fat, and “patriots” means someone who vigorously supports his country and ready to defend it from enemies or detractors. On the other hand, a “couch potatriots” is come from the slang “couch potato” which means the people who dedicated their life just to watching TV or laying on the couch. Meanwhile, Burger King modified that into “couch potatriots” as their tagline to make the people who dedicated their life just to lay on the couch and watching the TV become real patriots or heroes. It also supports by the verbal signs that do the salute gesture to make it more

clearly about what is the meaning of the patriot itself and then they become the real hero because of the era of pandemic COVID-19 they can save others’ lives.

The last verbal sign in this data is a written verbal sign “On Order \$10+. \$0 Delivery Fee was valid at participating U.S restaurant on the BK* App. Min. \$10+ order, excl. applicable taxes. Expires 4/19/20. See bk.com for details.” That signified there are terms and conditions if they want to have that free delivery service. The first one, they need to order a minimum of \$10 exclude taxes, the second one is they need to order through the company apps, and the last one, it only valid until April 19, 2020. This statement is categorized into denotative meaning because the company does not want to cause misunderstanding about the terms and conditions that apply.

Visual signs on Datum 2:

The first visual sign in this data is a person who is staying on the couch that moving up vertically. A signifier is a lazy man on the couch so that the couch move for them or the couch helps them to stand. That data is signified even you just stay home but you still have everything you need with no worry about the virus outside. The connotation meaning is applied in this data. This can be seen from the movement of the couch with a person on it. It shows that the man is very comfortable staying on that couch. It persuades the viewers to feel as comfortable as the man does by just staying home. If they need food they do not even have to go anywhere that is the purpose of this advertisement.

The next visual sign in this data is a clean room. It signified the comfortable, cozy, and safe feeling of a place to stay. The connotation of this sign is the company wants to create a comfortable and safe feeling for the audiences. Therefore, they become interested to stay home. It is also supported by the color selection of the image, which is mostly using earth and natural color, which signified a warm, cozy, and exciting feeling in the advertisement.

The previous study conducted by Komala (2013) also discussed about verbal and visual
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signs in an advertisement. The similarities between both previous and this study have short sentences with connotative meanings. It was used because short and simple sentences are usually remembered easily by the viewers. Moreover, the colors in both advertisements have the same intentions, which is to highlight the characteristics and advantages of the products even though they represented by using different color signs.

Datum 3:



Figure 3. Visual Signs on Datum 3

Verbal signs on datum 3

There are one spoken verbal sign and one written verbal sign found in this data. The first verbal sign is the spoken verbal sign, which said "And to help healthcare heroes, we are donating whopper sandwich to nurses, and we are also proudly supporting the American Nurses Foundation" through this statement, the company wants to tell their viewers about their support to the government through American Nurses Foundation by donating foods.

The second verbal sign is a written sign "Burger King* is donating 250,000 Whopper* sandwich to registered nurses to be distributed by the American Nurses Foundation. To support the Foundation, visit <http://supportnurses.org/>." this statement is made to deliver a clear information and more detail of the spoken verbal sign that talks about their supports to the government, specifically American Nurses Foundation, because the nurses works harder during the pandemic and the Whoppers are distributed to provide food

reserves for the nurses to keep them energized in carry out their duties.

Visual signs on datum 3

The picture of a woman doing a salute arm gesture. It represents a person who is ready to carry out their duties. In this audiovisual advertisement, there is more than one person do that gesture, but the writer only put one as the representative data. The salute gesture shows that she is ready to carry out the duties given by the nation to stop the pandemic.

The next visual sign is a couch that helps the woman to stand. It means the country or the society will help their people in this pandemic. This sign is associated with excluding concluded the nation gave a role to the people is for helping them to stay healthy and can quickly go back to normal routines.

The last visual sign is the cloth that has a muted purple color worn by the woman. The purple color means the future, imagination, dreams while calming the emotions spiritually. The company connotatively wants to represent the imaginations or the dreams of the company that wants to stop the spread of the virus, and then we can go back to the normal situation, where the people can go out with no worry. This color is also supposed to calm the emotion of the viewers spiritually that could make the people feel satisfied.

Comparing this study from the previous study by Kartika et al (2017) which discussed about verbal and visual signs on airlines advertisements, the difference that can be noted is that the previous study was focusing only on analyzing verbal and visual signs, while this study also contains the analysis of color signs. The result of the previous and this study was similar, because in both studies the combination of the video and narration matched perfectly to deliver the meaning behind the advertisement.

Datum 4:



Figure 4. Visual Signs on Datum 4

Verbal signs on datum 4

“Stay home of the whopper” is the verbal sign in this data. That sign is signified Burger King wants the people, especially their fans or viewers to stay home, it is also can help the nation to stop the spread of the virus that hit all around the world. This sign can be categorized as connotative and denotative meaning. Denotatively this sign has an obvious meaning. Meanwhile, the hidden meaning is coming from the tagline that they put “whopper” this word is a hamburger nickname from Burger King, and Burger King also calls the burger lover with this word, which means something especially big or impressive. Through this word, they want the viewers to do something big to save the world.

Visual signs on datum 4

The first visual sign here is the letter “A” in the word “stay” replaced by the shape of the house. It describes the people's need to stay in a house, to make it clear the “home” statement, which is a place to stay. This is a kind of connotative meaning, which tells the hidden message of the sign found in the data. The shape of the house can be described as a home, to make the people more clear about the verbal sign of “stay home” which is home is a place to stay.

The second visual sign is the letter “E” in “whopper” replaced by four lines with a different color; green, red, dark brown, brown. The word whopper itself means Burger King fans or burger lovers. This word can help to describe the meaning of those lines. The first line has a green color, the second line is red, the third is dark brown, and then the last is a brown color.

Each line is indicated the main ingredients of the burger; green can describe the lettuce, red described the tomato, dark brown described the meat, and the last is brown described the burger buns. This sign is categorized as connotation because from this image, the word “whopper” can be explained easily, which is the Burger Lover.

In the line with this finding, verbal, visual, and color signs was also found in the study of Komala (2013). The combination of those elements, made the advertisement convincing, interesting, and attracting to the viewers. Therefore, the viewers will be influenced in buying or using the products that advertised by the company. The same result goes to this study although the theory used by both studies were different. The study by Komala (2013) used the theory of Leech and Saussure to identify the verbal sign based on the structure of advertisement and the visual sign was analyzed by using the theory of Berger and Dyer, while this study used the theory of Saussure to analyze the signifier and signified to identify the verbal and visual signs, Barthes to analyze the denotative and connotative meaning, and Wierzbicka to analyze the color terms in the advertisement. Therefore, it can be concluded that all of the theories used by both studies were able to convey the message and meaning behind the advertisements to the viewers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the Burger King video advertisement has verbal and visual signs. The verbal signs are “your country needs you to stay on your couch”, “and order in”, “do your part and we’ll do ours”, “order through Burger King App and the delivery fees are on us”, “so staying home doesn’t just make us all safer, it makes you a couch po-ta- triots”, “On Order \$10+. \$0 Delivery Fee valid at participating U.S restaurant on the BK* App. Min. \$10+ order, excl. applicable taxes. Expires 4/19/20. See bk.com for details”, “And to help healthcare heroes, we are donating whopper sandwich to nurses, and we are also proudly supporting the American Nurses Foundation”, “Burger King* is donating

250,000 Whopper* sandwich to registered nurses to be distributed by the American Nurses Foundation. To support the Foundation, visit <http://supportnurses.org/>,” and “Stay home of the whopper”. Furthermore, the visual signs consist of human, activity, shape, background, and colors.

The verbal and visual signs in that advertisement have their messages and meanings, either denotative or connotative. The connotative meaning is dominantly found in this advertisement, it is because the advertisement is unique. They are dominant to promote the current situation of the pandemic rather than promoting their product. Burger King realized that the pandemic is very dangerous for human life. Therefore, they made this advertisement to help the government to remind the people about this pandemic.

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