

Verbal And Visual Signs in Burger King's Advertisement

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary digital environments, advertising plays a significant role in how people perceive and behave when it comes to choosing products. Brands use strategically selected verbal and visual elements to influence consumers, often implicitly. Although many researchers have examined how advertising can persuade people, there is still a limited integration between semiotic theory and how meaning is actually created in contemporary fast-food advertising practices. This study aims to identify and explain the verbal and visual signs found in selected Burger King advertisements, focusing on how these signs interact to deliver persuasive messages and strengthen brand identity. This research adopts a qualitative method with a semiotic approach. The data were collected using observation and documentation methods from Burger King's official Instagram posts. Five advertisements were selected based on their extensive use of verbal and visual elements. The data were analyzed using Chandler's theory of signs (symbolicity, iconicity, and indexicality) and supported by Clair's theory of color to examine the emotional impact of visual elements. The analysis reveals that verbal signs in the advertisements are predominantly categorized as symbolicity, using familiar cultural expressions and internet language to attract the audience. Visual primarily function as iconicity by realistically depicting food products to evoke appetite, while color choices enhance emotional appeal and visual focus. The study concludes that Burger King successfully integrates verbal and visual signs to create advertisements that are visually appealing, culturally resonant, and emotionally persuasive. These findings highlight the effectiveness of semiotic principles in advertising practice and contribute to a deeper understanding of how fast-food brands construct meaning and identity in the digital space.

Keywords: semiotic, advertisement, verbal sign, visual sign

1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, advertisements have become one of the most powerful tools for shaping public perception and influencing consumer behavior. Beyond product

promotion, advertisements construct persuasive messages through the strategic use of language, images, and cultural references. In the fast-food industry, visual branding memorable verbal slogans are central to building emotional connections with consumers. Among global fast-food chains, Burger King is notable for its creative and sometimes unconventional advertising approach, particularly on digital platforms like Instagram.

While advertising has long been studied from the perspectives of marketing, psychology, and linguistics, there remains a limited application of semiotic theory in analyzing both verbal and visual signs in contemporary advertising campaigns. Many previous studies focus primarily on visual appeal or language use, overlooking how the two modalities interact to construct meaning. This study aims to address this limitation by using semiotic theory to explore how Burger King advertisements integrate visual and verbal signs to create persuasive messages.

The objective of this study is to identify the types of verbal and visual signs used in selected Burger King advertisements and to explain their meanings through the framework of (Chandler, 2017) semiotic theory, specifically the categories of symbolicity, iconicity, and indexicality. Additionally, (Clair 2017) theory of color is employed to analyze how color choices contribute to the emotional and symbolic impact of visual elements. The research is guided by two questions: (1) What kinds of verbal and visual signs are found in Burger King's advertisements? (2) What are the meanings of those signs occurring in Burger King's advertisements? This study contributes to the field of semiotics and advertising discourse by showing how commercial messages are constructed not only through words or images alone but through the interplay between them. The findings show how fast-food brands like Burger King use popular culture references, wordplay, and color psychology to attract consumer attention and create brand identity. Several previous studies support the relevance of this research. (Sari 2021) examined verbal and visual signs in BTS's "Dynamite" music video using semiotic and meaning theories. (Prasetya 2023) applied semiotic analysis to public service ads on Twitter, while (Widhiarini 2024) analyzed Luxcrime poster advertisements using Dyer and Barthes' theories. These studies underscore the growing relevance of semiotic approaches to media texts, but none focused specifically on fast-food advertisements in the digital marketing context. This article extends the conversation by exploring how semiotic strategies are applied in Burger King's Instagram campaigns

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative method to examine the construction of meaning through verbal and visual signs in advertising. This approach is appropriate for analyzing symbolic, iconic, and indexical elements in advertisements, as well as understanding how these signs interact to deliver persuasive messages.

The data consist of five advertisements collected from Burger King's official Instagram account. These advertisements were selected because they feature extensive combinations of verbal and visual elements that are suitable for semiotic analysis and represent contemporary advertising strategies.

For collecting the data, this study used the documentation method and note-taking technique. The steps for collecting the data were: (1) observed the advertisement by visiting Burger King's official Instagram account; (2) documenting the data by screenshots individually and then compiled; (3) Note taking the sign find in Burger King's advertisement, the compiled screenshots were examined carefully and then the selected data were classified into verbal and visual signs.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative method with the following steps: (1) identified verbal and visual signs in each advertisement, (2) categorized and explained each sign based on Chandler's (2017) semiotic theory (symbolicity, iconicity, and indexicality), and (3) explained how color supports meaning using Clair's (2017) theory of color. The analysis was presented in descriptive language. The results are explained in paragraphs under each advertisement, supported by the identification of signs and their explanation meanings according to the applied theories. This process helps reveal how Burger King constructs persuasive and emotionally resonant messages through semiotic strategies.

3. Findings and Discussion

This study elucidates the findings of kinds and meanings of verbal and visual signs in Burger King's advertisements. There are three data that will be explained as follows:

Data 1



Picture 1 Burger King "Pollen-Free" Advertisement

One of the advertisements analyzed is Burger King's "Pollen-Free" campaign, published on April 8, 2025, on its official Instagram account. The verbal and visual signs in this advertisement interact to communicate both branding and health-oriented messages.

The main verbal signs identified are the phrases "BURGER KING" and "YOU'LL BE SAFE FROM POLLEN HERE." The phrase "BURGER KING" operates as symbolicity, as its meaning depends entirely on cultural and social convention. It represents a fast-food chain not through visual resemblance, but through recognition built over time.

Meanwhile, the phrase "YOU'LL BE SAFE FROM POLLEN HERE" functions as indexicality. The word "here" derives its meaning from the real-world location, referring to the interior space of the restaurant, implied to be free from allergens such as pollen. This statement points to an actual condition (being indoors and safe from airborne particles), rather than a metaphor, thus aligning with Chandler's concept of indexical signs.

Visually, the advertisement contains a large Burger King logo, positioned in a natural, outdoor setting. The logo itself is symbolicity, relying on cultural recognition rather than resemblance. The background features green grass, wildflowers, butterflies, and a bright blue sky, all of which are iconic representations of springtime. The floating white particles, resembling dandelion seeds or pollen, serve as indexical signs, signaling the presence of allergens in outdoor air. These visual signs set up the contrast that reinforces the verbal message: Burger King is a safe space away from pollen. Color also plays a significant semiotic role. The red in the Burger King logo conveys energy and appetite stimulation, while the brown bun suggests warmth and authenticity. The white background evokes cleanliness and safety, and the blue sky communicates calmness and trust. The green grass symbolizes freshness and health. According to Clair (2017), these colors are psychologically associated with comfort, nature, and hygiene, supporting the ad's intended message of safety and well-being. Overall, the combination of verbal signs, natural imagery, and strategic color usage effectively positions Burger King as more than just a fast-food provider. It constructs an emotional appeal rooted in health, cleanliness, and comfort, offering reassurance to consumers, especially those concerned about allergens. This advertisement highlights how semiotic elements can work cohesively to communicate both brand identity and lifestyle values.

Data 2



Picture 2 Burger King "Which Team Are You Rooting For?" Advertisement

The second advertisement analyzed is titled “Which Team Are You Rooting For?”, posted on Burger King’s official Instagram account on February 11th, 2024. The advertisement features two different burgers positioned to face each other, evoking a sense of competition. This is reinforced by two key verbal signs: the phrase “WHICH TEAM ARE YOU ROOTING FOR?” and the abbreviation “VS.” The phrase is symbolic, drawing on familiar language used in sports or contests to ask viewers which side they support. In this context, the word "team" symbolically represents each burger variant, and "rooting for" implies consumer preference. This playful phrasing makes choosing a burger feel like supporting a team, engaging the audience emotionally through the familiar theme of rivalry.

The word “VS”, placed between the two burgers, also operates as a symbolic sign. While it literally stands for “versus,” its cultural meaning has been shaped through common use in competitions, games, and sports. The audience recognizes “VS” not because it resembles conflict, but because its meaning is socially constructed. Here, it dramatizes the comparison between the two burgers and invites viewers to “choose a side,” adding energy and interactivity to the advertisement. Visually, the two burgers are clear examples of iconicity. They are realistically rendered with detailed textures including sesame seed buns, layers of meat, vegetables, and sauces which closely resemble real burgers. The burger on the left includes ingredients like rice, tomato, avocado, and beans, while the one on the right features shiny dark-red barbecue sauce. These visuals are designed to stimulate appetite and recognition without requiring prior cultural knowledge, as their resemblance to actual food is direct and intentional.

Between the burgers, sparks or fiery particles are shown to enhance the sense of competition. These are symbolic rather than indexical; they do not arise from actual burning or cooking but are added visually to imply heat, intensity, or a “duel” between products. This reflects Chandler’s definition of symbolicity, where meaning is shaped by cultural interpretation rather than physical reality.

Color also plays a crucial role. The brown buns convey warmth and authenticity, while green vegetables symbolize freshness and health. The red barbeque sauce triggers appetite and energy, and white accents (such as sesame seeds) suggest cleanliness and attention to quality. Additionally, the red and orange sparks symbolize passion and competition, enhancing the excitement of the visual narrative. The black background provides contrast and drama, making the colors of the burgers and sparks appear more vibrant. According to Clair (2017), black also conveys luxury and seriousness, which gives the ad a bold, striking appearance. Altogether, this advertisement uses verbal and visual symbolism effectively to create a narrative of competition and choice. By using culturally familiar phrases, detailed food imagery, and strategic color application, the advertisement engages viewers emotionally and visually, making the act of choosing a burger feel like participating in a fun rivalry. This strengthens brand identity and encourages consumer interaction in a creative, entertaining way.

Data 3



Picture 3 Burger King "Infinite Onion Ring" Advertisement

The third advertisement analyzed is Burger King's "*Rare Infinite Onion Ring*" campaign, posted on June 23rd, 2023 via its official Instagram account. This ad heavily draws on internet meme culture to construct humor and engagement through symbolic signs. The verbal signs in this advertisement include three key phrases: "YOU HAVE BEEN VISITED BY THE RARE INFINITE ONION RING", "LIKE + SHARE FOR GOOD LUCK", and "You Rule™". All three are categorized as symbolicity, as their meanings are culturally constructed and rely on shared understanding within online communities.

The phrase "YOU HAVE BEEN VISITED BY THE RARE INFINITE ONION RING" draws on the language of internet memes, especially those that promise luck or blessings if the viewer interacts with a post. The term "rare" in this context emphasizes the uniqueness of the moment, while "infinite onion ring" symbolically reflects the circular shape of the food item, resembling the infinity symbol (∞). These expressions are not literal but derive from digital humor conventions to create emotional appeal and a sense of exclusivity, making the onion ring feel iconic and "special" within internet culture.

The phrase "LIKE + SHARE FOR GOOD LUCK" also operates as a symbolic sign. While liking or sharing has no real link to luck, this phrase is familiar to users of social media platforms and is often seen in viral meme formats. It draws on a digital ritual that encourages interaction, using humor and superstition to promote engagement.

Similarly, the slogan "You Rule™" functions as a symbolic affirmation of consumer empowerment and personal connection, even though the word "rule" has no literal connection to the act of eating. Its symbolic meaning is constructed through Burger King's brand voice and cultural positioning.

Visually, the central element is an image of an onion ring, which functions as an iconic sign due to its resemblance to the real food item, golden brown, crispy, and circular. Viewers can recognize it immediately without needing cultural background knowledge. However, when the onion rings are presented in a stylized or exaggerated form, such as evoking the infinity symbol, the image also takes on symbolic meaning. It suggests concepts like timelessness or uniqueness, elevating the product beyond its literal form. Color also plays a significant semiotic role. The golden brown of the onion rings symbolizes warmth and authenticity, giving the impression of perfectly fried, high-quality food. According to Clair (2017), brown tones evoke comfort and trust, enhancing the perception of food freshness. The red background reinforces visual impact and emotional energy. As Clair also states, red is associated with passion, appetite, and urgency, and is commonly used in food advertising to stimulate hunger and capture attention. In this ad, red creates a strong contrast with the product, helping the onion rings stand out visually while intensifying the emotional atmosphere. Together, the combination of meme-inspired verbal signs, iconic visual representation, and psychologically effective color choices allows this advertisement to appeal to digitally engaged audiences. It creates a playful, shareable, and

emotionally engaging message that aligns with both Burger King's brand identity and the behavioral patterns of digital consumers.

4. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how verbal and visual signs in Burger King's advertisements work together to deliver persuasive messages by combining popular culture references, wordplay, and color psychology. Through the application of semiotic theory, particularly Chandler's theory of signs and Clair's theory of color, the analysis reveals that Burger King strategically uses symbolic verbal signs and iconic visual representations to attract audiences on both intellectual and emotional levels. One of the strengths of this study lies in its focus on both verbal and visual elements, showing how advertisements rely not just on text or image alone, but on the interplay between the two to construct meaning.

Another advantage is the use of real-world digital advertisements that reflect contemporary advertising strategies, making the study relevant to current media discourse and marketing practices. While the findings of this study offer meaningful insights, it is important to acknowledge that the results may not fully represent advertising strategies from other brands, cultures, or types of media.

Additionally, the interpretation of signs, especially symbolic ones may vary depending on the researcher's background and their familiarity with internet or pop culture references. That said, this study provides a valuable framework for understanding how advertisements communicate meaning through both verbal and visual elements.

It can be a helpful reference not only for students and researchers, but also for practitioners in media, marketing, and education who want to explore how messages are constructed and conveyed. In the future, similar research could be expanded by analyzing advertisements from various brands or platforms, or by examining how different groups of people react to the same advertisement. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how signs are interpreted across different audiences.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of awareness of the signs around us and how they influence the way we think, feel, and respond, especially in contemporary digital environments. By understanding the language of advertising, individuals can become more critical and reflective about the messages encounter every day.

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