



## Semiotics: The Hidden Language of Signs.

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### Introduction

Semiotics is the science of sign: any thing which functions in the communication. Semiotics is an extremely flexible tool which is used in wide range of academic field. Semiotics provides the translator of advertisements with a means to maneuver and handle language (linguistic sign system) and non-verbal sign systems. It is a sign system, which with the help of images tries to promote or to sell or to persuade consumers into changing their consumer behavior. Over all successful of an ad depends upon image, text, colour and other signs

Semiotics does the following:

- (i) Read the text.
- (ii) Read the culture.
- (iii) Make connections between the two.

The use of semiotics varies with the kind of product being advertised. Knowledge of semiotics gives the translator a better understanding of the inherent appeal of an advertisement. In cases where cultural elements play an important role in persuasive advertisements, semiotics acts as a tool or measure to gauge the cultural elements. Semioticians drag the unconscious messages being

transmitted into consciousness by isolating and identifying the signs to constitute the message. Persuasive advertisements can (and should be) translated in terms of semiotic guidelines, if cultural codes are at work and as such evident. Some advertisements strive towards a state of no-cultural categorization: in other words the advertisement focuses on emotions rather than objects or ideas

Semiotics can be defined in simple terms as the study of science: anything which functions in the process of communication. Signs are crucial to human existence because they are the basic underlying facts of any communicative process. Semiotics analyses signs as the agents which enable human beings to communicate, to represent the world one lives. Anything that is used for human communication is regarded by Semioticians as signs like food, music, gestures, facial expressions, clothes, films, commercials etc. An inherent knowledge of a set of cultural messages and conventions enable us to interpret each sign we encounter. Everyone is a semiotician because everyone is consciously or unconsciously interpreting different signs around them. For example traffic lights and road signs.

### **Linguistic Semiotics**

Two pioneers in the field of semiotics are the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure viewed language as a sign system and for him a sign has two inseparable components which are the signifier and the signified. Saussure also distinguished between Parole (individual utterances) and Langue the essential system which makes the individual utterances comprehensible. The study of Langue is of primary importance to the Semioticians.



### **Pattern of Signs.**

Peirce defined sign as something which stands to somebody for something and categorized it into three categories such as an icon, index and symbol. An iconic sign looks like what it represents--- a picture of dog for example or computer icons. An indexical sign is a clue that links or connects things in nature. Smoke for example is a sign of fire: icicles means coldness, a drop of tear means sadness. A symbolic sign is related to its referent by convention for e.g. words and traffic signals. Saussure's model is dyad model of which the sign is the central concept which has a two fold existence consisting of signifier which is the material idea whereas signified is its mental concept. Peirce's is on the other hand is a triadic model consisting of. Saussure and Peirce developed their theories of sign systems independently and both have been utilized by subsequent theoreticians.

### **Visual Semiotics.**

These three types of signs are of utmost importance in Visual semiotics. Visual semiotics is a branch of Semiotics that analyses how different visuals communicate various messages. Roland

Barthes is the first one to adapt the principles of linguistic Semiotics founded by Saussure and Peirce into the analysis of various phenomena of modern culture. He subjected to a deeper analysis a number of items like photographs, advertisements and movies which were hitherto not touched upon. In his groundbreaking work *Mythologies* published in France in 1957, he applied a structuralist analysis to the differences between boxing and wrestling, between soap powder and detergent, between drinking wine and drinking milk. He placed all these items in a wider system of values, beliefs and symbols further interpreted how each one constructs its meaning in relation to others in the chain. Fashion has been particularly a major target for Barthes as its semiotic character is rather evident.



Barthes is of the opinion that the meanings we bestow on images are not generated naturally. On the other hand, they are the produced by an inherent knowledge of culture and convention. Barthes termed the immediate visual impact created by an image as denoted meaning (first order) and the cultural implication as connoted meaning (second order signification). Then denoted meaning, in other words mean the first impression an image creates in the mind of the viewer whereas the connoted meaning is an invitation for a deeper analysis of the image to give a wider meaning to it. It is in this manner that semiotics is applied to visual and material culture. Barthes further developed the concepts of anchorage and relay in order to address the questions of relationship between images and verbal texts.



Visual semiotics is primarily concerned with the questions how meaning is created and conveyed through visual messages. Visual communication emphasizes the ways in which visuals communicate and create meaning. Analysis of visual texts becomes an important involvement for semioticians across the world and also for scholars working with visually intensive forms such as advertisements and television. Critics like Lynda Scott and Arthur Asa Berger have deconstructed the meaning of the '1984' commercial of Apple by a close reading of the coded messages in the advertisements. The categories of signs and the relationship between them create a particular system. Therefore advertisement has its own system of meaning.

Advertisements are of many types like those found in magazines and newspapers, display ads posted by businesses, small posters on walls and huge window hoardings. Then there are advertisements on radio and television. Advertising agencies in different parts of the world use semiotic concepts in the creation of print and visual advertisements to make it more effective.



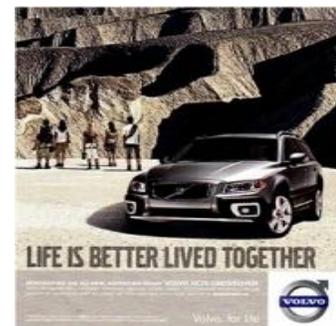
A semiotic analysis of advertisements shows that they are meant to move out of a page or screen and to provide meaning to our experience of reality. Apart

from the denoted meaning of an ad a deeper connoted meaning is unraveled as an outcome of a semiotic analysis. Furthermore different ads lend and attempt to promote a mythic meaning to the products and services they advertise. The mythic meanings generally focus on products. Advertisements give a social significance so that they can work in the real world as indexical signs connoting the buyer's good taste, trendiness or some other ideological quality. So ads function as important agents that give meaning to producers, buyers, the readers of ads and the social worlds in which we and the products exist and it plays a vital role in constructing social identities of human residing in a society. Social status, membership to a particular social category and the sense of our special individuality are all created by ads. So which car a person uses or which brand of jeans or perfume you wear all become indexical signs of a person's status and social identity. There may only be minor differences between different brands of product. So the primary function of an advertisement is to highlight those differences between two distinct products and also a particular social identity is created for them and these ads become identical with certain social values. The consumers who buy and use that particular brand becomes associated by the social value perpetrated by that particular brand.

A tremendous increase in the production of goods which occurred as a result of industrial revolution in turn demanded new methods of distribution. As the magazines with new types of advertisements became widespread awareness about different products also increased. A turning point in the production of advertisements came when technical terms like copy, slogan and trade which were extensively used in advertisements.

Until then the creation of advertisements was the responsibility of a single person, but gradually a team of persons was assigned for the job, and the idea of agency came into existence. This agency decides the selling idea, technique, budgeting for the clients. As a package campaign was initiated a great transformation occurred in the choice of advertisements ideas. As a consequence of increase in the production after Second World War, different models of the same product became available in the market and the creators of advertisements had to think of innovative methods to allure the consumers.

In order to advertise a service or a product, initially the market has to be analyzed. It is an observation based on cultural status, income, education, gender, caste, age of the consumers. The quality of a product and the needs of the consumer are assessed on the basis of these observations. The sensing of images is very essential in particularly in print media where there is a lack of sounds. For example the advertisements of Volvo cars are designed by using only letters. The branch of studies which deals with similar analyses is known as semiotics. In this method the viewer is invited to decipher the meaning of an advertisement from the visual forms used in it based on their knowledge level rather than conveying it directly to their



minds. Different lay-outs like indoor and outdoor are used in these ads. Viewers have a certain intimacy with advertisements the meanings of which they decipher.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study shows that a semiotic analysis of visuals can be tested against viewer responses to identify patterns of meaning construction. It is also found that visuals carrying different types of semiotic meanings bring forth different levels of responses from viewers. In general, more viewers note iconic message elements than symbolic or indexical elements.

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