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## The Semantic Analysis of the Selected Billboards

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### Article Info

#### Article History:

Received 26 November 2023

Revised 11 December 2023

Accepted 24 December 2023

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### Keywords:

Advertisement,  
Billboards,  
hidden meaning,  
media

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to delve into a comprehensive analysis of diverse billboard advertisements, uncovering intricate linguistic, cultural, and societal nuances embedded within their messaging strategies. To obtain the objectives of the research, the researchers collected the data in the form of photographing in Sawari Bazar, District Buner. The framework used in this study was the proposed concept of Saussure (1956) which contains sign: signifier and signified. The study revealed that these billboards were used to grab readers' mind attentively and involved them in the displayed items. The research unravelled billboards representing a narrative of modernity, international appeal, and brand association with renowned personalities, transcending national boundaries. Additionally, the healthcare sector, revealing a complex interplay between medical claims, societal beliefs, and cultural notions. It also illuminates the multidimensional nature of billboard advertising, underscoring how these visual and linguistic mediums not only sell products but also serve as reflections of societal aspirations and cultural norms.

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### Introduction

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. Actively rooted in our daily lives, it significantly influences public understanding of the truth about our society. Serving as a powerful tool for disseminating culturally acceptable norms and traditions (Powlishta, 2004), the media, particularly through advertisements, serves as a channel to communicate messages about products and services. In contemporary society, gender representation in advertisements is pervasive, reflecting a shift in the portrayal of women from historical norms. Today, women are depicted not only in traditional roles but also as essential contributors alongside men in various domains (Orth, 2004). As per Cook (1992), advertisements serve not only as sources of entertainment and information regarding specific products but also as potential instruments for misleading or cautioning the audience about competing products. The various mediums of communication, such as the internet, television, billboards, radio, films, recordings, books, newspapers, and magazines, collectively contribute to entertaining the public. Through advertisements, these mediums showcase the cultural, financial, social, spiritual, religious, and political dimensions of the community (Walters, 2008). Folkert and Lacy (2004, p. 275) emphasize that the primary objective of advertising is to disseminate ideas across a broad audience either at a particular moment or over an extended time frame, typically involving a skilled communicator.

Semantics, the study of words, phrases, and their meanings, is a crucial aspect of understanding language. Language acquisition and comprehension are essential components, particularly in professions such as education and business where effective communication is paramount. Linguistics identifies various categories of meaning, with metaphorical language playing a significant role. As defined by Wibisono and Widodo (2019), metaphorical language involves words or sentences with implied meanings, expressing ideas in diverse ways while conveying the same

message. Semantics delves into how language users comprehend words, phrases, and sentences, exploring how they convey meaning. Palmer (1978) technically terms this exploration as the study of semantics, an investigation into the often contested and ambiguous concept of meaning within language theory. The arrangement of words in a statement or written text directly influences the meaning of individual words, as highlighted by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). Semantics further encompasses the organization and expression of meanings in language, greatly influenced not only by linguistic factors but also by environmental and contextual elements, including a company's profile. Businesses believe that effective marketing plans, as suggested by Davidson (2013), can increase sales and profits by conveying the company's ideas, cultural expressions, and social responsibilities through mediums like billboard advertising. However, it's acknowledged that these advertisements often tend to exaggerate societal norms rather than authentically portraying them, influencing both society and culture at large.

### **Problem Statement**

This study aims to provide a semantics analysis of some local and national billboards displayed in District Buner. Through a focus on both their visual and verbal content, this research seeks to identify and analyse the hidden meanings, messages, and implications provided by billboards.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) to explore the influence and interaction of billboard advertisements on customer emotions, and the effectiveness of diverse advertising strategies.
- 2) to uncover the underlying deeper meanings conveyed by billboard signs, delving into the messages' nuanced layers and hidden implications.
- 3) to assess the effectiveness of billboards in effectively communicating intended messages to customers, examining how well these advertisements convey desired information and impact audience perceptions.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

This study was limited to the analysis and exploration of the local and national billboards. It was limited to the area of District Buner. The researcher took the billboards in this city and analysed according to the objectives of the study.

### **Literature Review**

According to Hartati, Panah, and Matsom (2021), 'advertising' represents a form of public announcement strategically designed to captivate the audience directly. This field operates with discipline, aiming to convey precise messages to specific audiences at opportune moments. The essence of advertising lies in generating innovative and unique concepts, amalgamating three socially guided elements: relevance, impact, and originality (Dennaya, & Bram, 2021). Cook (2001) contends that commercials serve to educate, persuade, remind, and significantly influence, even shaping public beliefs, emotions, and attitudes. Essentially, advertisements operate on a dual front: promoting products while also reshaping societal norms. In essence, they create a perceived necessity or desire for products within the public. He views commercials as akin to public service announcements or cautionary messages, exemplifying the power of advertising in raising awareness and melding perceptions and realities. Walters (2008) expresses that these advertisements embody distinct forms of discourse that profoundly impact the construction of our individual identities.

According to Palmer (1978), semantics, often technically referred to as the study of meaning, encapsulates one of the most intricate and elusive concepts within language theory. The arrangement of words within sentences inherently shapes their meanings. Billboards and advertisements primarily aim to persuade consumers and entice customers, utilizing subtle signs and symbols to convey profound messages. Goddard (1998) argues that advertising extends beyond merely promoting branded goods; it serves as a means to communicate textual concepts that project personal, collective, or corporate images. A significant societal function of advertisements is their capacity to influence societal shifts, as asserted by Purba and Herman (2020), who define advertising as a form of communication geared toward attracting customers by providing information. Semantics, or the extraction of meaning, is fundamentally embedded in the essence of billboards, according to Farbay (2002), who emphasizes that the objective of advertising campaigns is to fulfil consumer needs and desires. Capturing audience attention proves pivotal in advertising, employing attractive models, humorous imagery, and vibrant colours to engage consumers. Billboard commercials,

as highlighted by Van Meurs and Aristoff (2009), prioritize artistic appeal to bolster brand and product recognition, introducing new products while ensuring comprehensible branding. The strategic placement of billboards offers advertisers creative opportunities, especially with dynamic text messaging. In essence, advertising could be likened to the art of engaging human intelligence long enough to extract financial gain. Notably, in Chicago's industry, approximately \$4 billion is annually allocated by tobacco companies for promoting their hazardous products. Tobacco and alcohol corporations rank among the top advertisers in magazines, newspapers, and Western zone billboards. The evolution of tobacco advertising trends showcases endeavours such as customer giveaways, event sponsorships, and commercials (Hackbarth, Silvestri, & Cosper, 1995).

Durmaz (2011) defines billboards as the practice of announcing sales or enticing consumers to purchase goods or services, serving as a targeted method for sales. Ryans (1996) aligns with this view, equating advertisements with crucial tools for the advancement of companies and marketers. Advertising stands out as a pivotal marketing strategy encompassing the promotion of goods, services, concepts, and images. Anusha (2008) criticizes media for often misrepresenting women, highlighting how ads often glorify and objectify women's bodies to sell products. Fairclough (1989) links language and society, stating that text is not merely a static entity but an evolving occurrence. Billboard commercials, according to this perspective, transcend simple branding exercises, functioning as channels for communication between businesses and the public, conveying specific messages that culminate in the interpreted text. Anagbogu et al. (2010) regard language as a tool for expressing ideas, emotions, and desires through intricate symbols, emphasizing its vital role in human communication. In advertising, language serves as a medium to convey messages, ideas, and emotions to the audience, employing language not vastly different from everyday speech but strategically intended to persuade. The language in advertising is carefully crafted to influence the perceptions and actions of a targeted group.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, the researcher utilized a qualitative research method, presenting data in phrases while employing a qualitative approach to delve into the semantics and diverse layers of meaning prevalent within billboard advertisements. Miles and Crisp (2014) emphasize the richness and depth of analysis provided by qualitative data, offering well-supported insights into human processes. Creswell and Miller (1997) highlight the use of qualitative methods in investigating social and human topics, representing a distinct methodological tradition. This research specifically engaged in semantic analysis of billboard advertisements, striving to unearth the underlying, profound meanings embedded within them.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The researchers collected the data by photographing various local billboards situated in Sawari Bazar, District Buner. Employing semantic analysis, they scrutinized these billboards, extracting profound meanings embedded within the diverse selection of advertisements. This comprehensive approach involved selecting different billboards to unearth layers of significance within their messaging and visual content.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws upon Ferdinand de Saussure's theory (1956), which posits that sentences possess two layers of meaning: a surface level and a deeper, intended meaning. Saussure's theory introduces the concept of signs, consisting of the signifier and the signified, which encapsulate the relationship between the physical form of a sign and the concept or idea it represents.

### **Data Analysis**

Different number of advertisements were collected that show diverse background and culture. They show the idea of advertisers to attract their customers.



To initiate, the primary goal of any advertising agency revolves around attracting an expanding clientele base to fulfil their objectives. These agencies employ specific techniques, such as scrutinizing billboards or commercials created by companies like Telenor, which the researcher focused on in this study. Initially, the researcher aimed to unravel the surface-level meanings conveyed by the current Telenor billboards, spotlighting the company's best offers and affordable packages. These billboards notably emphasize easy access to various apps like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube with their data packages. Leveraging suitable techniques, Telenor strategically produces billboards to allure potential clients. Delving deeper into the present billboard, the inclusion of well-known Pakistani drama actors and actresses becomes evident. This choice suggests their widespread recognition within society, portraying them as charismatic and appealing figures. Additionally, the billboards imply that these personalities utilize mobile apps facilitated by Telenor's data packages. Importantly, Telenor's aim is to captivate the younger demographic, a strategy executed by prominently featuring these Pakistani drama celebrities.



The design of this billboard strategically aims to promote a dairy shop, emphasizing milk and dairy products. It incorporates key features meticulously selected to convey distinct messages and capture the attention of passers-by. The choice of red for the shop owner's name holds immense significance, symbolizing focus, passion, and importance. The prominent red letters ensure the name stands out, boldly proclaiming, "This is our shop, and this is who we are." Strategic placement of contact information in the lower right corner offers practicality, facilitating easy discovery of the shop's address. The deliberate use of black text against a bright yellow background ensures high visibility, urging viewers to stop by. The central positioning of the phone number emphasizes its importance, maintaining a clean and professional look while prioritizing readability.

Images of a cow and a buffalo in the upper right corner serve as visual cues, highlighting the shop's focus on dairy products. These animals symbolize milk production, freshness, and purity, subtly indicating the origin of the dairy items sold here. An image of milk in a black pot adjacent to these animal graphics emphasizes the notion of fresh dairy products. The stark contrast draws attention to the product's quality and freshness, assuring customers of the utmost purity in the milk sold at this establishment.

The deliberate use of a white background isn't arbitrary; it symbolizes purity, cleanliness, and simplicity, evoking feelings of freshness and quality. This backdrop allows other elements to shine while reinforcing the perception of high-quality and pure dairy products. The inclusion of green grass and yellow flowers in the bottom left corner adds a natural and serene touch, subtly implying the well-cared-for environment where these dairy products



originate. This composition creates a harmonious contrast with the clean white backdrop, reinforcing the message of freshness and quality derived from a natural setting.



The billboard's vibrant crimson backdrop instantly captivates attention, conveying an aura of energy, passion, and excitement. Red's association with strong emotions like desire and attraction within a retail context suggests the store offers trendy and fashionable apparel. Contrastingly, the use of white for the shop's name, "Great Stylish Fabrics," creates a powerful visual contrast against the red background, enhancing legibility and echoing the store's commitment to clarity and aesthetics. The white clothing showcased in the corner complements the colour scheme, symbolizing purity, cleanliness, and the inherent design and craftsmanship of the items available.

The specific font chosen for the shop's name holds significance in portraying the brand's identity, potentially conveying traits like modernism, elegance, or traditional values. The inclusion of clothing imagery serves multiple purposes, notably communicating the shop's primary product: stylish clothing and textiles. Positioned strategically in the corner, these images draw attention and associate the business with trendy apparel selections. The depiction of white apparel enhances the sense of elegance and style, hinting at the high quality and allure of items available. Placed centrally, the shop's name becomes the focal point of the billboard, encapsulating several essential concepts. "Great" implies dedication to quality, "Stylish" emphasizes trendiness, and "Fabrics" hints at a wide range of textile offerings. While the billboard lacks specific contact information, its presence in the lower left corner remains crucial for potential consumers seeking details about products or services.

Although a shop logo is depicted, details regarding its design, colours, or symbolism are not provided. Logos, vital for brand recognition, offer additional insights into the shop's identity and principles. This semantic analysis of the "Great Stylish Fabrics" billboard underscores deliberate choices in colour, typeface, and imagery, aimed at communicating enthusiasm, style, and quality. The billboard's purpose is to capture attention, convey the shop's key offerings, and entice potential consumers to engage with the brand.



This billboard represents a community's ethnic slipper shop, with the shop's name prominently displayed in the local language, serving as the focal point. The strategic use of red and blue not only captures attention but also carries cultural significance, potentially symbolizing historic and vibrant hues deeply rooted in the local heritage. The billboard's background is divided into distinct sections, employing white and blue tones to create a visually striking

contrast. White, associated with purity and simplicity, combined with blue, which evokes sentiments of trust and tranquillity, might imply a diverse range of slipper options, from elegant to dependable and comforting.

A broad black strip spanning the upper right corner stands out against the predominantly white and blue backdrop, emphasizing the information within. This section holds vital details about the shop's shoe quality, showcasing the shop's commitment to excellence. The use of black conveys professionalism and dependability, reinforcing the shop's dedication to quality. On the left side, two red and white sample local shoes not only showcase the shop's diverse offerings but also highlight the products' local and cultural aspects. The incorporation of regional colours signifies a focus on traditional craftsmanship and design, appealing to customers seeking culturally relevant footwear.

The slipper shop's phone number, prominently placed in the lower left corner, ensures easy access for potential clients to make inquiries or purchases. This positioning emphasizes the shop's transparency and accessibility, facilitating customer engagement. Overall, this billboard effectively communicates the essence of a local cultural slipper shop, emphasizing quality, a diverse selection, and a reverence for traditional and cultural characteristics. The strategic use of colours, layout, and content harmoniously creates an aesthetically pleasing and culturally resonant advertisement for the slipper business.



If viewers engage with these billboards, the surface meaning emphasizes their allure and beauty, intending to attract attention. The prominent depiction of a large eye signifies beauty and draws people in, contributing to the billboard's captivating nature. Uniqueness is also a focal point, appealing to viewers' curiosity. However, delving deeper, the billboards portray a young bride, her modest attire reflecting cultural values and societal norms. The bride's modesty is evident, symbolizing the societal expectations placed on women. The mention of a "lady tailor facility" in the billboard writing highlights societal norms where men are discouraged from engaging in bridal attire decoration, reflecting Pashtun societal standards.

Another image portrays a smiling girl using beauty powder, perpetuating stereotypes about women's beauty standards and the pressure to maintain an appealing appearance. In this context, the emphasis on enhancing beauty aligns with societal expectations, suggesting that as a girl's beauty increases, so does her happiness. These billboards, beyond their surface appeal, offer a nuanced glimpse into societal norms, cultural values, and the societal pressures on women to conform to beauty standards in pursuit of happiness.





The researchers delved into the nuanced significance behind billboard advertisements, initially exploring their overt implications. Evidently, the primary aim of these billboards was to attract a larger customer base. The written content on one such billboard pointed to specialized treatments for specific organs like the brain and liver, among others, by a homeopathic or medical practitioner. However, the deeper implications of these advertisements left the researcher puzzled.

Upon scrutinizing the language used, the phrases "male weakness" and "female weakness" were noted, carrying profound connotations. These terms, commonly seen inscribed on walls, hint at an age group seeking improvement in aspects related to their gender. Globally, the understanding is that the desire for sexual engagement transcends age barriers, providing pleasure and appealing universally. This understanding drives the continued attraction of clients based on these terms. The gravity and implications of these phrases on the billboard reveal a deeper societal undercurrent that taps into universal desires, attracting clientele across age demographics.



Examining the beginning of this billboard, the prominent presence of the word "Nestlé" immediately grabs attention, alluding to Nestlé's diverse product range. Primarily geared towards children, this billboard ad taps into the innate childhood desire to emulate airplanes, drawing kids' fascination. The item, a blend of milk and wheat, is portrayed as a source of strength and energy. This depiction hints at the inherent power conveyed by the billboard, suggesting that consuming this product empowers children, endowing them with strength and intelligence.

Notably, the phrase "energy for school" carries a deeper significance upon closer inspection. It implies that children need to be in good health to attend school, linking the consumption of this food item to fitness for learning. Essentially, the billboard communicates not only the product's energy-boosting qualities but also its role in supporting children's health, suggesting that consuming it equips kids to engage effectively in their educational endeavours.



This billboard epitomizes modernity, evident in its message "New Taste, New Thinking," tailored specifically for the younger demographic. Traditionally, the elderly might not prioritize flavorful food, but in contemporary times,

young people relish such culinary experiences. This emphasis on good food aligns with the presence of young individuals in our society, resonating strongly with them.

A closer look at the billboard unveils advertisements not just for spices but also for a range of national business offerings such as pickles, rice, chicken, and fish spices. This broader spectrum of products showcases the diversity offered by this national company beyond just spices. The appeal for the national spices extends to other products too, enticing potential customers to explore and consider other offerings like pickles, leveraging the familiarity and reputation of the brand.



The advertisers deliberately opt not to feature common individuals in their advertisements, opting instead for celebrity figures to captivate the attention of new customers. By showcasing well-known celebrities like Afridi and Misbah, the advertisers aim to leverage their widespread recognition and global fame. These two personalities enjoy international acclaim, attracting attention not just within Pakistan but across the globe. Their presence in this advertisement serves as motivation for viewers, irrespective of their location.

While customers recognize the Pakistani origin of these products, it's noteworthy that these items are globally exported. This billboard's messaging extends beyond national borders, emphasizing the products' international reach and appeal. Additionally, the billboard's association with an energizing beverage aligns with the portrayal of strength, a quality exemplified by many cricket players who are known to consume Pepsi. This link to vitality serves as a persuasive tool to attract clients, leveraging the drink's perceived energy-boosting attributes in conjunction with the renowned figures depicted in the advertisement.





The fundamental objective of advertising agencies is to attract an expanding clientele base, employing diverse strategies to achieve this goal. Initially examining the surface message of current billboards, they convey that a particular doctor possesses specialized skills for treating children. However, a closer analysis reveals deeper layers of meaning. The first sentence, emphasizing the doctor's 45 years of experience, might entice clients despite potential lack of substantial expertise.

Under Pakistani regulations, practitioners without proper medical licenses cannot practice, especially when combining homeopathy with supplements and other medications. This detail, indicated by the phrase "Here, H represents homeopathy, indicating that this is not a doctor," exposes a potential lack of professional legitimacy. Additionally, the doctor is promoted as treating "sory /sɔre/ and jabby /dʒabaɪ/" disease, a term from Pashto language describing a malnutrition-related condition in children causing weakness and dehydration. Curiously, while the doctor isn't a specialist in this ailment, the phrase is unfamiliar within the medical community.

This billboard is not only a representation of the doctor's practice but also reflects aspects of Pashtun society and lifestyle, as these notions of "sory /sɔre/ and jabby /dʒabaɪ/" hold significance among the majority in these regions. It illustrates the intersection between medical claims, societal beliefs, and cultural notions, showcasing a complex interplay between healthcare advertising and cultural perceptions within the targeted community.

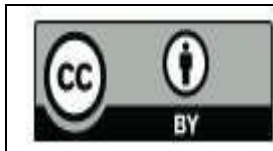
### Conclusion

This research has unearthed a multifaceted incorporation of linguistic terms and concepts within billboards, showcasing an intricate blend of language and cultural influences. Notably, code-switching emerges as a pivotal element in these advertisements, bridging linguistic gaps while resonating with cultural values and religious sentiments to effectively engage customers. The study reveals a deliberate integration of signs such as WhatsApp and symbols that pique customers' interests, reflecting a strategic alignment with contemporary communication trends. However, the conservative nature of our society dictates a confined usage of signs on billboards, aiming to circumvent potential cultural and religious sensitivities. This restraint limits the breadth of symbols and signs employed in these advertisements, offering a glimpse into the intricacies of navigating societal norms within advertising. Ultimately, the research underscores the profound impact of semantic signs, language, and symbols on shaping the trajectory of a business. These elements not only wield significant influence over the branding and messaging of a company but also play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and perceptions of clients and customers towards a specific business or product. The nuanced interplay between language, culture, and symbolism in billboards represents a complex and strategic effort to communicate effectively while navigating the cultural landscape, highlighting the intricate dynamics between advertising strategies and societal norms.

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