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Essence at a Glance: A semiotic Analysis of Time Magazine Cover Page

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Abstract

The study focuses on the semiotic analysis of Time Magazine cover pages; cover pages of the magazine from the year 2016-2022 have been selected for the current project. The study susses out that how the crux or the central thought of a magazine is inculcated in the cover of it; a cover of a magazine is pondered on in order to develop it in such a way that it covers almost all the aspects of the magazine, and to present the inside articles in iconic or symbolic form in reference to their relative importance. Sign Theory of Peirce is exploited in order to interpret the visuals displayed on the cover pages of the two issues of Time Magazine. The covers of the two issues sum up the pre-American Presidential Election Propaganda literature against Donald Trump and the post-election scenario in the minimum length of two pages. The very enrichment of semiotic presentation facilitates memory and attracts viewers to the visual message. The study reveals the fact that the visuals on the cover attract the masses to the inside articles, and in turn they are motivated by the thoughts of the authors in their decision making. The study surfaces the fact that how the world views, and decisions of the readers or viewers of one particular type of magazine are streamlined in a particular direction for some implicit beneficiaries.

Introduction

Human beings are named social animals by sociologists because they generally live in vigorous communion to society. The very socialization process necessitates cooperation, and communication. One might say that communication has an edge over cooperation because an individual first communicates one's needs or desires to others, and then expects their cooperation. The very act of communication is usually performed through language as Rosengren (2000) defines it as an effective tool of communication for human beings. Sebeok (2001) considers human language as a communication system which is based on signs. The signs are available in multiform for human communication, and they utilize them for multi purposes. Communication is considered fruitful and interesting where a sign easily conveys the sense of a coder to a decoder. Sometimes the sense is conveyed in a very condensed and saturated form. Understanding of such signs needs active participation on the part of the participants in communication. Lacey (1998) states that a reader or a viewer may be moved away from the passive consumption of images and may be made an active participant in the process of sense making from images. The current study looks for the very practice to make one awake to the silent thoughts of images which one comes across in different types of media. In addition, the fact has surfaced that images are not the true counterpart or the equivalent of reality, but they are developed from a certain perspective. Decoding the perspective of an image in media will enhance the understanding of the appropriate sense of it, and in a way will be on the safe side from misconception.

Behshad (2015) conducts a semiotic analysis of magazine covers and elaborates the different modes projected by the images on the covers. Barlow (2016) completes a project on the covers of Cosomopolitan Magazine and displays

the spread of intercultural values through magazine images. Shakoore (2016) studies the covers of Time Magazine and compares the portraits of eastern and western female educationists.

One important aspect of the study of the magazine cover pages is their enrichment; they present the essence of the whole issue in a minimum place. In other words, a magazine cover brings the essence of the magazine to surface and conveys the message of the magazine in a short possible place, and time. In addition, the cover visuals have a greater appeal to memory, and greater attraction as well for the customers. It is important to discuss the perspective of those cover page visuals to understand their purpose. Fish asserts the very fact, 'it is impossible to mean the same thing in two (or more) different ways' (1980: 32). So, the study is conducted to look beyond those images at the thought process which brought those visuals to the cover page.

Problem Statement

Dearth of time is an issue faced by almost everyone in this modern mechanized world where every eye searches for a compact look to grasp the crux of a thing immediately. Newspapers in headlines, films in teasers, song videos in clips are common tastes among People of the day; in order to cater for the taste signs (images) are exploited in multiple ways. Magazine covers utilise different types of signs to squeeze and sequence the entirety of magazines at a glance to entice readers to avail them; the decision of availing, or ignoring a magazine is usually dependent on the cover. This current study explores the covers of Time Magazines with the intent of their Presentation in reference to signs on Cover Page.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are the following:

- 1) To evaluate the role of cover page in a magazine
- 2) To discover the perspectives of signs on the magazine covers
- 3) To know the use value of signs on the magazine covers

Research Questions

- 1) How do images on the cover present the essence of a magazine?
- 2) How do images convey different perspectives?
- 3) Why do magazines utilise signs for their covers?

Significance of the Study

The man of today is faced with the issue of shortage of time; the Pressing demand of the People of the world of today is to get through things in the shortest possible span of time. A quality representation of the inside contents of a magazine on a cover page may possibly quench the thirst of getting through in the shortest possible time. In addition, this study facilitates signs utilisation in view of representation which enhances the appropriate use of signs for expression of thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

Literature Review

Saussure (1966) considers language to be a system of signs or codes which may be audio or visuals. Those signs play a vital role in the construction, and deconstruction of different human endeavours such as world views, and ideologies. The importance of signs in human communication has made the study of signs interest well-known language philosophers, psychologists, and linguists. Saussure (1983) calls the study of signs 'Semiology' and declares the goal of such a study is to investigate the nature of signs, and the role the signs play in human society. He develops his dyadic model of sign and divides into signifier and signified. Signifier stands for the form which a sign takes and signified is the concept to which the form refers. On the other hand, Peirce (1996) terms the study by the name of semiotics and relates it to logic. He comes up with his triadic model of sign: representamen, object, and interpretant. Representamen is the form which a sign takes, object is termed as a referent of a representamen, and Interpretant is the sense which a sign develops. Eco (1979) classifies signs into two basic categories of artificial, and natural, and later on makes further classification on the basis of the modes of sign production. Barthes (1985) is of the view that sign takes connotative interpretation and takes the values of dominant ideology, and thus signifies different dominant myths.

Behshad (2015) conducts modal analysis of magazine covers and reports that visuals are chosen in reference to different modes. He uses Halliday's Model of Functional-Systematic Grammar to decode different discourse

functions of magazine cover visuals. He discovers that visuals on the covers of the magazines are utilized to display different modes which are motivated in turn by different functions. The current study focuses on the meaning, or the message conveyed by the visuals on the covers of magazines.

Barlow (2016) studies the role of the Cosmopolitan Magazine Covers in the spread of interculturality. She utilizes Berger's method of semiotic analysis and observes four covers of the magazine in five categories: race, clothing, artifacts, body language, and words and phrases utilized in the presentation of cultural links. The study reveals the facts that the magazine tries to spread certain ideology among females belonging to different cultures of the world. It is considered to be a sort of effort to spread one particular culture in women at the cost of the replacement of their own culture. The current study is not conducted in view of any specific culture; it looks for the meaning communicated in saturated form through the cover pages of magazine.

Shakoor (2016) makes a semiotic analysis of two-Time magazine covers; the covers selected for the analysis display two female characters: Sara Palin from America, and Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan. The study focuses on the presentation of female educationists through visuals; the effort discovers that the magazine manipulates the identities of the personalities which are displayed on its covers. The study is different from the current study in the sense that is not limited to any particular gender but surfaces the role of the covers in the spread of the whole contents of magazines.

Research Methodology

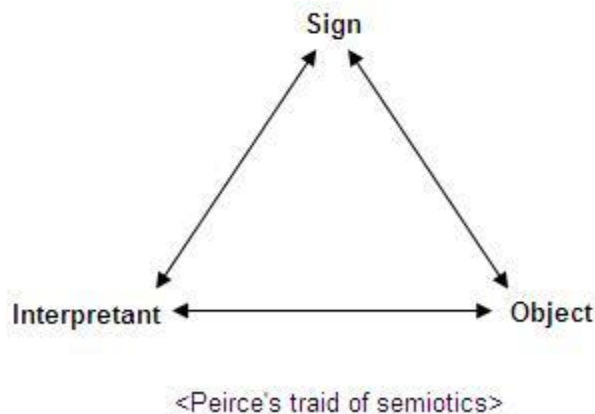
The study is qualitative in nature which is based on Peirce Theory of Sign which appreciates three categories like icon, index, and symbols; descriptive analysis of the visuals on the cover pages of Time Magazine is made with the view of decoding the types of signs, and the thought process beyond the presentation and selection of the signs (images) in view of the squeeze and sequence of content of Magazines.

Delimitations of the Study

This study limits itself to the analysis of the cover pages of Time Magazine opted through convenience sampling; cover pages are delimited in reference to time by selecting covers from 2016-2022. The analysis is limited to Semiotic analysis only which is further narrowed down to signs analysis in reference to Peirce Theory.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Peirce model of sign because it provides a pragmatic approach in semiotic analysis. According to Chandler (2007), Peirce develops his sign theory in three steps: 1867, 1903, 1907. His model is triadic in comparison to Saussure diadic model; his process of semiosis consists of three parts: object, representamen, and interpretant. An object is the reference of a representamen (sign), a representamen is the form which a sign takes, and interpretant is the sense which a sign makes. Eco figures out the model:



(1976:59)

Peirce (2007) believes in the dynamic and dialogic aspects of sense making; he is of the view that the meaning of a representamen develops in the process of interpretation. According to Murphy (1961) Peirce classifies signs according to object functions into three categories: Icon which shows resemblance to its referent in quality (painting or portrait, diagrams, geometrical figures), Index- natural or causal relations (words, pointing fingers, proper names), and Symbols which are arbitrary and have general or conventional connections (traffic signals).

Data Analysis & Discussion



The cover offers a detailed view of the United States pre-election scenario. Likewise, it portrays a through vision of the future of America- the decision in election frames the future of American nationals. That is the reason that the image as icon created on the cover, is rich in signification. Visualization is utilized to provide a rich and saturated vision of American future in a single image because majority of the population in the current busy world does not have time to go through the whole magazine. The creator of the visual has tired his level best to provide the necessary details to the viewers in order to facilitate them in their decision making or to motivate them in their decision making.

The iconic photo is presented on the cover in a way which fills the whole frame; the filling of the whole frame signifies the importance of the electoral decision on the part of the masses. The thorough iconic visualization of Trump is provided in order to enhance all the features of his personality into the minds of the masses, and thus develop a public image of the election presidential candidate. The icon is presented in isolation to limelight the fact that nothing is more important than the issue of American presidential election in general, and the election candidate in particular. It is an invitation to American masses to postpone their other activities for a while and give due consideration to the election affairs. The icon suggests that the need of the day is to focus on the solo project of American election because the very action will have its effects on all the aspects of American life.

Viewers discover the symbol TIME on the forehead of the iconic photo of Trump which has dual interpretations. In the usual sense, it is the title of the magazine; in addition to this usual sense, it invites the viewers to the thought that it is the time to think about the future of America because forehead usually symbolizes thinking and decision making. The viewers are tried to be made ready to think about the forty fifth American presidential elections.

If we proceed ahead of the forehead, the face offers five iconic boxes. These boxes are placed on the face of the election candidate to project the thought that face is the index of the mind. The iconic boxes are supplemented by symbolic signs: bully, showman, party crasher, demagogue, and forty fifth elections. The image developer has filled in the four boxes with tick marks which symbolize the availability of the traits. The symbol 'bully' is interpreted as a person who intimidates the poor and downtrodden strata of society. So, the box presents an alarming threat to American minorities that they will be crushed or thrown way if they think of ticking the fifth box. In other words, the ticking of the fifth box will be a hazardous action for the American minorities. The next box or the second box is accompanied by the symbol of 'showman'. The very icon and symbol display that the face is mere a man of labial service, and media image whose words may never see objective realization. The icon suggests that the candidate lives on mere display, his personality lacks originality and truth. It suggests that whatever Trump says in his election campaign; they are just parts of his election campaign which he will never realize after getting the presidential chair.

That is to say that his election campaign policies are just for the sack of winning elections. The third iconic box is accompanied by the symbol, 'party crasher'. The icon with the symbol suggests that the face is not only a danger to the general masses, and his political opponents, but he is a hazardous person to his party, too. The fourth representamen is again an iconic box which is accompanied by symbol, 'Demagogue'. The symbol may be interpreted as a person who extols popular prejudiced policies in order to gain public interest in his political campaign, and to convince them to vote. Such a type of a person is usually blamed for the discrepancies between actions and words. In addition, such type of character is criticized for withholding rationality, and blowing emotionality for political gain.

These four representamens are presented as blots on the face of the US Presidential Election candidate, Donald Trump. The fifth box poses a question to the American masses in reference to the blotting iconic boxes. The iconic box without a tick mark is utilized to ask two questions from the American masses: Will American masses elect such a candidate? And Who are the people in American masses to elect a person with such alarming, and defaming traits?

This cover offers an effective visual form of Propaganda Literature; it may be a quite useful tool for defaming the political opponents. Thus, the whole anti Trump election campaign is summed up on the cover page which provides the essence of all the articles which fills the inside pages of the magazine.



The recent after election cover page of Time Magazine offers another image of the post American election scenario. The iconic photo of the successful candidate, Donald Trump is presented as a representamen. The iconic image presents Trump seated in a luxurious Louis XV chair. The chair which he resides in is an iconic representamen

of a referent object which is utilized for setting. In addition to this iconic straight forward reference as interpretant, the image symbolizes power because the chair shares paradigmatic relation with other symbols like head, president, authority, chairperson, etc. In objects, it may be replaced by an iconic figure of a 'couch' or 'crown' which enlivens the traditional distinction between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers used to sit above the masses in order to be visible to the masses and to be differentiated from the rest. The coach provides a dominant position to a ruler over the ruled; it symbolizes power and authority.

Trump's pose is a traditional one which expresses power, and authority; the pose is usually called power-portrait pose. The person portrayed feels confident and authoritative because he has secured the seat what he was striving for. The iconic image of the chair symbolizes the government of America, the power seat of White House. The concept of sitting or seating symbolizes stability as well.

The cover displays a solo iconic image which again induces the importance of the image; it pronounces that there is no other event more important than Trump ensuring the seat. The colour of the cover background or the frame filler colour-palette, is purposefully kept soft blue. The colour is usually termed Koda chrome which was popular in 1930's and 1970's. So, the palette shifts us back into history of the era when the American masses saw WW II, Cold War, segregation, and dozens of political movements.

The symbolic inscription on the cover, 'Person of the Year', makes him stand in the line of those prominent historical figures who were previously chose as persons of the years: Stalin, Hitler, Khomeini. The inscription may be interpreted that Trump, the president-elect may also perform outstanding, and brutal works like the others who were previously nominated. It may also suggest that election of Trump as an American President is also a historical event in the sense that it is quite the opposite of the pre-election dominate thought, and propaganda.

A through vision of the title 'TIME', the 'M' of the title is placed at the exact back of Trump's head. That may symbolically be interpreted as the Time favoured Trump. It may also be interpreted that Time is in the head or decisions of Trump.

Conclusion and Future Study

The study reveals the fact that the title covers of a magazine play a vital role in presenting the essence of the issue of a magazine, and in enhancing the attraction of the issue. The signs on the title page are presented after a deliberate thought process with proper goals to achieve; and it is not a haphazard or random process of selection. It is recommended for future that a study may be opted to determine the ratio of presentation on the title page in the shape of sign in reference to the inside articles.

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