



# The Verbal and Visual Signs of Memes Found on Pinterest

Ivana Victorya Maharani Abrahams; I Gusti Ayu Vina Widiadnya Putri; I Dewa Ayu Maharani Santika

English Study Program, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Maharaswati Denpasar University, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

semiotic; verbal signs; visual signs; Pinterest



This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.

Copyright © 2023 by Author. Published by Institut Pariwisata dan Bisnis Internasional.

## ABSTRACT

This study concerns with the term of semiotics that is aimed at describing the verbal and visual signs as well as analyzing the functions and meaning of signs. The data of this study were taken from popular memes in 2020 on Pinterest or [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com). The data were collected by observation method. The collected data were analyzed by descriptive qualitative method. Furthermore, the data were presented by formal and informal methods. There were three theories applied. The theory of semiotic was proposed by Saussure (1983), the theory of meaning was proposed by Barthes (1997). In addition, the theory of color was driven by Wierzbicka (1996). The result of this study showed that there were 6 verbal signs and 8 visual signs based on 3 data used in total. The visual signs are the most sign used on each meme. The purpose is to attract people on the internet when communicating with friends and shared for humorous purpose because it also conveys someone's idea.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The people as social beings are required to communicate with each other as that concern is strongly pertained to their attachment environmentally. The thing that they have to realize in commencing a communication is that a tool in which the communication can be sustainable. The tool that is involved is a language. According to Sweet (2001), language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts. In communication, language is also represented as a sign in which it has taken a part in human surroundings. According to Saussure (1959), a sign is the composition of a signifier and signified. A signifier is a form that the sign takes. On the other hand, a signified is the concept of verbal and non-verbal. For instance, you are in a particular fast-food restaurant. You are being noticed by an advertisement that presents the food picture as well as a few words in order to adorn the advertisement. Unconsciously, the advertisement attempts to communicate with you by means of signs, in this regard, the verbal and visual signs. The verbal sign is related to words, phrases or sentences. According to Dyer (1993), words not only describe things, communicate feelings, associations and attitudes, but they also bring to our mind. Meanwhile, the visual sign always is connected with a picture. According to Dyer (1993), picture is easier to understand than words and it has a big impact than text or words. The picture is considered as the way of offering greater opportunities for the communication of excitement, imagination and mood of the people.

The earlier case strongly pertains to the study of semiotics. Semiotics is defined as study of how people make meaning through both linguistics and non-linguistics way. As semiotics deals with meanings, Barthes (1997) proposed two types of meanings, they include denotative and connotative. Denotative means obvious meaning of sign. Instead, connotative means more open to be interpreted than denotative meaning. Barthes uses the denotative and connotative 'levels of meanings' to analyze the signs into two parts which are the verbal sign and the non-verbal sign. The verbal sign deals with the texts. Meanwhile, the non-verbal sign relies on images that support the verbal sign. In addition, Barthes semiotics theory is recognized as two orders of signification. The signification is classified into two steps, they include the first order of signification and the second order of signification. Semiotics has been applied in various types of media such as advertisement, magazine, posters and so on. Furthermore, memes are able to utilize in this concern as memes always contain a specific visual and verbal sign. On the other word, memes involve the combination of pictures, words as well as signifier and signified. All in all, memes that were taken from Pinterest being used by the writer as this such data source was rarely analyzed and also memes provide some jokes that people have mostly been interested in nowadays.

\*Corresponding author.

E-mail: [ivanaabrahams18@gmail.com](mailto:ivanaabrahams18@gmail.com) (Ivana Victorya Maharani Abrahams)

There are similar studies concerning on semiotic analysis that had been conducted by some other researchers. They are Juliantari (2014), Purwani et al.(2017), Nilasari et al (2018), Suarmita et al.(2016). In those studies, the authors found that the verbal and visual signs were used to show emotions and attitudes such as sad, happy, mocking, fear, and other related emotions based on each study’s data source. Although both recent and previous studies analyzed the same topic, the key difference between current study and past studies is recognized from the data source. This study relies on some memes that were found on Pinterest. Memes provide readers verbal and visual signs that are required in order to develop this study. On the other word, the analysis could be elaborated further. Although the majority of previous studies were aimed to show emotions from their data sources, the recent study contributed a different finding and perspective in figuring out the functions and meaning of signs from the memes. The similarities can be found based on the method applied. The previous and current studies used descriptive qualitative method. Furthermore, there are some similar theories applied.

**2. METHODS**

The data of this study were obtained from several memes on Pinterest. Memes were chosen due to some considerations. In addition, the precise consideration is that memes were rarely analyzed in the previous studies as they often focused on analyzing either advertisements or magazines. Memes mostly related to someone situation and also memes were used to create some jokes among circles of chat room or on the internet. Meem’s occasionally appeared on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook in which the application was installed and operated by a lot of people. The data were collected by means of observation method and proceeded to be analyzed using descriptive qualitative method. The last, the data were presented by both formal and informal method.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Based on the result and discussion, the writer found 6 verbal signs and 8 visual signs to be discussed in the data. The data were taken from the Pinterest application and there are 3 memes to be analysed. The data are presented in a table and the analysis are described descriptively . The table describes several analyses of the signifier and the signified coming from verbal and visual signs as well as the meaning of each meme.

**Table 1. Verbal and Visual Sign Findings**

The sign	Total	Percentage
Verbal sign	6	57%
Visual sign	8	43%
Total	14	100%

**Data 1**



**Figure 1. Math Lady Meme**

The Math Lady meme refers to the pictures of Brazilian actress, she is Renata Sorrah playing Nazaré Tedesco in a scene from the telenovela, *Senhora do Destino*. The pictures are often used as reaction images to express confusion.

Signifier	Signified
When you forget where you put your phone	It describe about someone who always forgot about her phone

The theory explains that verbal sign and visual sign is related to words, phrases, or sentences. The verbal sign is really important to communicate the meaning of someone’s thought. Verbal signs always related with words and sentences. The first verbal sign in this meme is “when you forget where you put your phone” and it signifies about someone who forgot where she/he puts important belongings like a phone.

Based on the theory of meaning by Barthes (1977), signification is divided into two steps. The first is signification “denotation” refers to the obvious meaning of the sign and the second is signification “connotative” is the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the feelings or emotion of the memes reader. The denotative meaning in this meme is a person who does not remember the even or how to do something. The connotative meaning in this first verbal sign is the creator wants to describe people in every daily life, mostly people in the world always forgot their important belongings when at home, school or public places.

Signifier	Signified
Math	It describe about math formula
The woman with confused face	That describes about someone who is confused or forget about something

The first visual sign is the math sign on the picture. It signifies about math formula usually used by upper class students in the school particularly in a higher level of mathematics. The denotative meaning in this sign is numbers, shapes, a special system of symbols, and rules for organizing them or a set of numbers and letters that represent two equal quantities and showing how a quantity depends on one or more other quantities. The connotative meaning is about one’s mind, usually, someone who forgets their important things always thinks hard to find it. So, it is like a student who studies hard to solve math problems.

The second visual sign is a woman with a confused face. The signifier above signifies someone who is confused or forget to put their important things. The denotative meaning in this memes is someone who unable to think clearly, understand to find something. The connotative meaning in the meme is the creator wants to describe about one’s expression and usually people always create an expression like the woman on this meme when trying hard to find their phone or other belongings.

**Data 2**



Figure 2. 60’s Spiderman Meme

The 60's spiderman meme is adopted from spiderman cartoon episode 19b of the 1967 "double identity" in which two persons in spiderman costumes are pointing each other. This meme is very popular and the image is used with various other text caption.

Signifier	Signified
When you and your sibling catch each other sneaking food in the middle of night	It describe about two persons who catch each other doing something suspiciously.

The first verbal sign said "When you and your sibling catch each other sneaking food in the middle of night". That sentence signifies about two persons who catch another person in the same room doing something suspiciously. The denotative meaning in this verbal sign is someone who discovers, finds or becomes aware of something. The connotative meaning in this sign is the meme creator wants tell us his/her experience in the kitchen when her/his siblings sneaking a snack or some food to their room so they will not feel hungry in the middle of night and also the creator is shocked because she/he did the same things, that is sneaking to find some food to eat.

Signifier	Signified
Red and blue clothes	It represents spiderman clothes
White handwritten	To make the words more clear
Black bacground	Emphasize the white words

This 60's spiderman meme has 3 visual signs, the first visual sign is the red and blue colored clothes. The colors represent the spiderman clothes. The denotative meaning in the first visual sign is very clear that it is about the clothes of superhero, namely spiderman. The connotative meaning of spiderman uniform is Marvel recognizes that it never be a problem to attract American audiences by draping their product in the flag. The creator also wants to tell if the meme is inspired by the spiderman which wears red and blue clothes. Second verbal sign is white handwritten. It signifies to make the words more clear. The denotative meaning of white color represents purity. The color's simplicity is not affected by any other shade. White represents all that is good and it symbolically is an opposition to black color. For the connotative meaning in this sign is the creator wants make the sentences more clear and make the caption more understandable to the reader. The last is black background through the signifier, it signifies to emphasize the white words. The denotative meaning of black color is the symbol of elegance, power and mystery, whereas the connotative meaning of the black color is the creator used it for background as it is more suitable for white handwritten and also black is the opposite of white color

**Data 3**



**Figure 3. The doge dog meme**

The female Shiba Inu was in the original meme. She was sent to an animal shelter and adopted by Japanese kindergarten teacher, Atsuko Sato in 2008. The dog meme is an iconic internet meme that became very popular and that meme typically consists of a picture of shiba inu dog.

Signifier	Signified
I hope, I survive..	It describes someone who hopes to survive the situation
I hope someone likes my tik tok	That describes someones hoping for many likes in social media
Teenager mid 1900's	That sentence describes teenager's life in 1900
Teenagers today	That describe about teeneger style in modern era

The first verbal sign in this meme is "I hope, I survive". It signifies about someone who hopes for a better situation in their life. The denotative meaning in this verbal sign is something good or one's desire or wish can be come true in the future. The connotative meaning in this sign is the creator explains about the suffering situation in the war to memes readers. Second verbal sign is "I hope someone likes my tiktok" that signifies that someone hoping for many likes in social media. The denotative meaning in this second verbal sign is very clear that the person wants all people to like their artwork or video in TikTok. The connotative meaning is the creator describes about someone who wants a big fame in every platform. Third verbal sign is "teenager mid 1900's", it signifies as teneegar daily life in 1900's era. The denotative meaning of the sign is the situation happening or done every day in 1900's, whereas the connotative meaning is that the sign describes about teenager daily life in 1900's who is obliged to fight and protect their country from enemy or colonization. Last verbal sign is "teenager today" that signifies about teenager style in modern era. The denotative meaning in this sign is a specific shape or design, especially someon's hair, clothes, or furniture and for the connotative meaning in this sign is the creator wants to describe about teenager today which have a stylish clothes or branded ones so their appearance always looks cool in social media.

Signifier	Signified
Black hand written	The black colors make the words more obvious
Mid 1900's hat and weapon	It describes about war equipment in 1900
Modern necklace and hair	That describe about accessories in modern era

This meme has 3 visual signs, first visual sign is the black hand written, it signifies to make the words more obvious. The denotative meaning in this sign is black is an incredibly strong and often associated with negativity, evil, the unknown, formality, death, power strength, elegance and seriousness. The connotative meaning in this sign is the creator wants to make the word more clear and have a power so the meme reader gets more clearer to read the words or sentences. Second , the visual sign is hat and weapon in 1900's and it signifies about war equipment in 1900. The denotative meaning in this second visual sign is a set of tools and clothes necessary for a specific activity or purpose and for the connotative meaning in this sign is the writer describe about the tools when the teenager back days went to war to serve their country. The last visual sign is the modern necklace and hat, it signifies as a accessories in the modern era. The denotative meaning in this sign clearly explain about a style of people in modern era and for the connotative meaning is people in the modern era always wants their appearances to be better than others.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the result and discussion that have been presented above. The writer found the verbal and visual signs in each meme, there are 6 verbal signs and 8 visual signs. The verbal sign come from words and sentences in the picture and for the visual signs are always connected through facial expression, colors, and appearance that are presented in the picture. In addition, the denotative and connotative meanings are also found in each meme and supported by theory of meaning by Barthes. The theory can be concluded that denotative as a first order meaning and connotative meaning as a second order meaning. The connotative meaning is able to deliver the idea of the creators because through the hidden meaning, the creator can make his/her purpose, such as being sarcastic on something or someone and also giving an appeal to something for others. The connotative meaning is more related and by analyzing the sign through the picture and caption. Therefore, the meaning of the memes and what the meme users try to explain or convey can be easier to understand. The writer also suggests to the next researcher to read any literature with a related topic to get new insight and knowledge on verbal and visual signs.

## 5. REFERENCES

- Barthes, R. (1977). *Element of Semiology (Lavers, Annete & Smith, Colin, Trans.)*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Crystal, D. and Robins, . Robert Henry. (2021). Language. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/language>
- Dyer, Gillian. (1993). *Advertising as Communication*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Febi Purwani, D., Wandia, I., & Maharani, S. (2017). Semiotics with Special Reference to Leonardo Dicaprio's Oscar Memes. *Humanis*, 18(1), 252–259.
- Juliantari, N. (2014). Semiotic Analysis of “the Conjuring” Movie Poster Advertisement. *Humanis*, 9(3), 1–7.
- Nilasari, N. L., Sudipa, I. N., & Sukarini, N. W. (2018). Sticker Emoticons Used in LINE Messenger; A Semantic Study. *Humanis*, 585.
- Prasetya, E.K., Erfiani, D., & Suari, D. (2018). The Verbal and Visual Signs of tourist Attraction Found in Bali Best Adventure Magazine. *Journal. Badung. Dhyana Pura University*.
- Saussure, F. (1983). *Theory of Signified and Signifier*. Geneva: McGraw- Hill Book Company.
- Wayan Eka Suarmita, I., Wayan Sukarini, N., & Weddha Savitri, P. (2016). Connotative Meaning Of Verbal And Visual Signs In Printed Perfume Advertisements. *Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Unud*, 17, 73–80.
- Weirzbicka, A. (1996). *Semantic Primes and Universal*. United Kingdom: Oxford University.