



An Analysis of Semiotics in Balenciaga Advertisements

Desy Deria Panggabean¹, Arsen Nahum Pasaribu², Donna Ria Pasaribu³

^{1,2,3} Sastra Inggris, FBS, Universitas HKBP Nommensen

e-mail: desy.panggabean@student.uhn.ac.id

Abstract

Advertising is one of the media used to promote a product. Balenciaga is one of the fashion brands that is very famous because the advertisements and products displayed have successfully generated controversy. The controversy arises because the signs used in the advertisement seem strange, unusual, and off the mark. These signs are analyzed using Roland Barthes' Theory. The purpose of this research is to find signs along with denotation meaning, connotation meaning, and myth in Balenciaga advertisements. Descriptive qualitative analysis is the method used. The results of the research show that the signs found in Balenciaga advertisements have denotation, connotation, and mythological meanings. The signs represent sexuality issues, war issues, environmental issues, and poverty issues.

Keywords: semiotics, Roland Barthes, Balenciaga, advertisements

INTRODUCTION

Language is indeed the main supporting medium in communication. Every communication that occurs is certainly part of feelings and thoughts. The output can be in the form of ideas or works. Coupled with the existence of technology that is developing very quickly, it makes every individual have a place to pour the results of their thoughts and feelings. To a certain level, language is used professionally for the needs of a group.

Instead of communicating verbally, humans often use gestures, facial expressions, and images as a medium for expression. The symbols that appear or are created also have meaning; in this case, humans are the ones who give this meaning. For example, if we see an apple in one place, the meaning is not necessarily the same in another place. It could be that they see it as an object that is not just a fruit, but also as an object that has historical value, artistic value, and selling value. In the field of technology, Apple is synonymous with the name of an electronics brand. But in agriculture, apples are a fruit that has selling value. Giving meaning to an object gives rise to a field of study called semiotics.

Semiotics is the study of symbols and signs. A symbol can be an image, a word, or a sound. The essence of semiotic analysis is to find out what something means, or, more precisely, represents. For example, when you see an advertisement, some kind of thought

comes to mind. The utilization of semiotics is growing rapidly. The most common outlet for semiotics is advertisements.

Advertising, somehow, has become a big part of most people's lives. Advertisements are inseparable from the commercialization of goods or services that are often found in various places: grocery stores, malls, offices, and even other public places. Advertising is a very effective communication instrument in society. It requires knowledge, persuasion, and encouragement for commercial reasons (Ariani, 2021). Advertising has become one of the many media used to convey messages from one person to another, be it in the form of words, implied messages, or just from the visualization of the image. Sometimes an advertisement seems to mean nothing to some people, just a picture on paper or the internet media, and is passed by. However, for others, it can have a deep meaning.

With this utilization, the commercialization of goods is able to attract the interest of connoisseurs because it has distinctive characteristics. International brands are competing to create visuals that can attract attention. These components shape the image of an item into an exclusive and luxurious item.

Balenciaga is one of the luxury fashion brands known for its innovative designs and use of symbolism in its collections. However, in the past decade, Balenciaga has received quite a lot of attention from various groups for commercializing products that are not in accordance with the model used. Furthermore, the collection of advertisement pictures has several mystical elements and leads to vulgar symbols. For example, in the Gift Shop collection, advertisements at the end of 2022. On those ads, Balenciaga uses children as models, but unfortunately, the brand's items do not fit because the brand uses sexual themes, which are Bondage, Dominance, Sadism, and Masochism (BDSM). This is clearly seen in the appearance of a doll that uses a set of BDSM items and is held by a child.

The advertisement pictures raise quite a lot of opinions on social media, most of them was negative. In addition, the response of netizens posted to boycott Balenciaga products, such as burning the products, criticizing the artists who endorsed the products, and creating a petition for Balenciaga to make clarifications about the advertising pictures. Hence, Balenciaga removed its posts from the Instagram feed as well as the official website.

From the explanation above, this research raises social issues circulating in online media about the use of symbols that are not suitable for the public and are even being traded because it is feared that it will be considered commonplace in social life. There may be some connection between semiotics and Balenciaga in terms of analyzing the use of symbols in their advertisement pictures. The writer is interested in conducting a deeper analysis to draw a more specific correlation. The writer will analyze the semiotic components present in Balenciaga advertisements using Roland Barthes' theory. According to the writer, Roland Barthes' theory is very appropriate to use to analyze the symbols contained in Balenciaga advertisements because there are several signs that lead to unusual things. Therefore, the title of this study is An analysis of Semiotics on Balenciaga advertisements.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative method. Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative descriptive research in that the writer would be interested in the process, meaning, and understanding gained through the word. In this study, the writer focused on the theory of Roland Barthes's semiotics analysis, which was familiar with denotation, connotation, and myth. The object of this research is to analyze and explain the denotation

meaning, connotation meaning, and myth meaning of every advertisement. The writer's data are obtained from the Balenciaga controversial advertisement pictures. The writer found the data from several websites due to the ads on official Instagram and websites being deleted. There are six data points that will be analyzed in terms of denotation, connotation, and myth. Data collection techniques will be carried out by documenting the advertisements found on the internet (Sugiyono in Musfiana et al., 2023). The writer has several steps in order to collect the data, namely: 1. The writer will browse all the controversial advertisements of Balenciaga one by one 2. After finding the advertisement, the writer will download the advertisement 3. The advertisement will be input into a table in a Word document 4. Then, the writer will arrange the advertisements. The Technique of Analyzing Data. The data will be analyzed by using the model of Miles & Huberman in Siregar (2021) that involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion. Each was explained briefly as follows: Data Reduction, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification.

RESULT/S AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the writer found the signs. The signs had their own meanings, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The following are the signs found in the Balenciaga advertisement pictures.

Table 1. The denotation, connotation, and myth of the signs in Balenciaga advertisements

No	Sign	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Data 1	A girl was standing and smiling. She is wearing a pink t-shirt. Meanwhile, the bedroom is full of stuff.	A girl in a bedroom stands on a small chair and is wearing pink T-shirt. The wall is decorated with planets and two dolls, a snake, and a teddy bear. The room is filled with everyday objects, except for the unusual neck straps and teddy bear doll.	The bedroom is a private space for self-expression, with pink being a symbol of femininity and big dreams. The snake and bear are cunning and strong, while the teddy bear is an abnormal item.	Pink is popularized by the Marquise de Pompadour and has been used in fashion. The teddy bear is associated with bondage, dominance, sadism, and dan masochism, which are often erotic practices or roleplaying
Data 2	A boy was standing. He is wearing a hoodie, trousers, and shoes. The room is full of stuff.	A boy wearing a black hoodie and red shoes was standing on the mat. The wall is filled with abstract graffiti The room is filled	A boy in a study room wears a black hoodie and red shoes, symbolizing masculinity. The abstract graffiti on the wall represents	Black and red are strong colors, with red playing a significant role in the French Revolution. Black was used in the 2nd century for Queen Victoria's funeral. Abstract graffiti

		with various objects, including caps, shoes, accessories, and a taped chair.	uncertainty and free expression. The floor is filled with everyday objects, except for the teddy bear doll, which is considered abnormal.	represents a creative mind, while the boy's teddy bear with neck straps resembles bondage, dominance, sadism, and masochism (BDSM), erotic practices involving discipline, dominance, and submission, making it inappropriate for children.
Data 3	Three high heels, which are black, gray, and green.	In the data 3, the picture it's high heeled crocs. High heels are types of shoes where the heel is higher significantly. The name of the product is Balenciaga x Crocs. There are 3 types of colours namely black, grey, and green. These products were made from rubber.	High heel had connotation fancy. These shoes are worn to protect and increase the beauty of the feet. Each colour has own meaning. Black had connotation death or sadness, grey had connotation uncertainty, and green had connotation growth or life.	King Louis XIV popularized high heels due to his short body. In the 18th century, they resurfaced with feminine modifications and varied colors. The image features a unique shape with black, grey, and green representing life cycles. Rubber material used, aiming to save the earth by recycling.
Data 4	a woman is wearing taped body suit and glasses. She is holding a bag.	A woman was standing and wearing black glasses. The bag and the body of the woman wrapped with Balenciaga tape. The colour of the background is black.	The woman was stood and wore black glasses had connotation confidence. The body suit tape and bag tape were connotated iconic item. The black background had connotation of sadness.	Body suit or jumpsuit was first made for paratroopers during the World War II in 1919. As time passes, it becomes a fashion style. Balenciaga body suit tape is using tape and similar to caution tape. This bodysuit made to paid tribute to Ukrainian refugees amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
Data 5	Two pair of	The picture in data 5 is called	The black and white colour	In May 2022, Balenciaga's

	sneakers.	Destroyed Sneakers. The physical appearance of these sneakers is torn, dirty, and worn. These sneakers had black and white colour.	shoes had connotation balanced life.	Destroyed Shoes collection featured worn-out sneakers. The black and white colors symbolized a balanced life because these shoes represent the inability of lower classes to afford new shoes, while the upper class's willingness to buy expensive goods reflects their social status.
Data 6	three bags with different colour	There are three Trash Pouch with different colour namely blue, yellow and white. The pouch was made from lambskin.	The Trash Pouch has connotation as a humble bag. The blue and yellow has connotation as a Ukraine Flag. While the white one has connotation peace.	The Trash Pouch released on August 2022. This bag was inspired from the trash bag. Since the bag is an act of peace for the war in Ukraine because using blue and yellow as the colour of the bag, Balenciaga also represent that the war is useless as a trash.

Based on the signs in Balenciaga advertisements, it can be concluded that Balenciaga uses the signs to convey a message of peace, addressing social inequality and sustainability with the principle of recycling. However, data 1 and data 2 are regrettable because they allude to sexual issues by using children as role models. In terms of the signs and meanings contained in the Balenciaga advertisements, the writer interprets each advertisement as follows;

Table 2. The Interpretation of Balenciaga advertisement pictures

Data 1	The advertisement picture trying to convey message which is a girl must have big dreams, also have the courage to make it come true. The objects around the little girl represent things that girls like in general. However, this message is a little hampered because not all the objects around her are appropriate for her age stage.
Data 2	The advertisement picture transferring a message which are a boy as a young man should have a creative mind to create a new thing. However, the message was confused by objects such as teddy dolls with BDSM equipment.
Data 3	The advertisement picture representing how fashion brand can be attractive by the physical appearance which is collaborate with Crocs, American footwear company. This product can be long lasting because

	the material can be recycling as it signified on the colour of the product.
Data 4	The advertisement picture is similar to caution tape. The tape were wrapped the whole body of the model look like body suit and also wrapped the bag. These ads represent Balenciaga stand bravely to oppose the war in Ukraine.
Data 5	The advertisement picture is show “broken sneakers”. These products had represented a balanced life and at the same time showing the differences on our social life according to the colors. The inability of lower classes to afford new shoes, while the upper class's willingness to buy expensive goods reflects their social status.
Data 6	The advertisement picture show Trash Pouch with three colour namely blue, yellow and white made from lambskin. Since the bag is an act of peace for the war in Ukraine because using blue and yellow as the colour of the bag, Balenciaga also represent that the war is useless as a trash and each belligerent country should have compassion for the impact of the war.

Based on data 1 and data 2, the writer found that there were similar meanings contained in both advertisements. The use of clothing colors for the girl and the boy interpreted the characteristics of each gender. Besides that, the room wall decoration in each advertisement was interpreted as an imagination and an expression of thought. Meanwhile, the objects around them interpreted the children's preferences and nature. However, some inappropriate objects or unusual things, such as restraints on teddy bears, actually refer to adult things (BDSM). Based on data 3, the writer found that the advertising picture represented fashionable and comfortable shoes but still prioritized environmental friendliness. These are interpreted based on the color and shape of the shoe.

Based on data 4, all the signs contained in the ads interpreted that every individual had to bravely stand up and defend Ukraine in the war that occurred in 2022. Based on data 5, the interpretation of the advertisement is a paradox in life. Worn and broken shoes are usually used by poor people because they can't buy new shoes. But the damaged shoes in this advertisement are specifically used by the upper classes so they can experience how poor people live in general. Lastly, in data 6, the Trash Pouch represented a humble bag because inspired by the trash plastic bags and the color of the Ukraine flag. This advertisement was also created as a form of defense of Ukraine.

Discussion

The writer has already discussed the semiotic analysis of Balenciaga advertisement pictures using Roland Barthes theory. There were six advertisement pictures that the writer analyzed. Each of them has a denotation, a connotation, and a mythic meaning. The meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth on each Balenciaga advertisement picture was interconnected. The denotation meaning is a literal definition of the physical appearance of the object. While connotation and mythic meaning are interrelated, which leads to socio-cultural conditions and personal associations.

Balenciaga's advertisement pictures aim to attract the audience's attention by showing signs that seem strange and unusual. The strange or unusual signs were clear. On data 1 and 2, Balenciaga used the BDSM object. On data 3, Balenciaga used the environmental issue of recycling products. On data 4 and 6, Balenciaga shows an act to defend Ukraine. The last, on data 5, Balenciaga used social issues, in which poverty can be a subject for making a product advertisement.

The findings of this research differ from previous research. Another semiotic analysis of Barthes is also found in memes, traditional wedding ceremonies, music videos, billboards, and films. An analysis of Barthes' theory was conducted by Panjaitan & Pasaribu (2023). In their research, they used memes as an object to be analyzed. The meme was expressed verbally and visually. However, there are similarities in this research, which are the method and the findings of the research.

Moreover, Passandaran (2019) uses Barthes' analysis. He analyzed the traditional wedding ceremony and the variety of materials used during the ceremony. However, the similarities that were found in this research were the method and the findings of the research. Further research was investigated by Oktavyanthi & Kholiq (2018). They were analyzed using music videos that were expressed verbally and visually. This research has similarities, namely that it analyzes denotation and connotational meaning using Barthes' theory and method.

In addition, difference from another research study was found on the billboard. This research was uncovered by Manik et al. (2022). They use Barthes, and concerning context, writers use the theory of Spacey. However, there are similarities in this research, namely the method of collecting the data. Further research from Sembiring et al. (2022). Even though they have the same analytical theory, Barthes' theory, they add a moral message that is in accordance with the results of the analysis. However, the similarities in this research are in the method. The previous research explanation proves that this research is different. Some previous research mixed the theory of analyzed data, which Roland Barthes used to analyze the denotation, connotation, and myth, with another theory to analyze values like these conveyed through language that contains signs. Meanwhile, this research only focused on Roland Barthes theory.

CONCLUSION

In this section, the writer presents several conclusions regarding the semiotic analysis of Balenciaga advertisement pictures: 1. Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of this research shows that there are various signs contained in the Balenciaga advertisement. These signs have each meaning, including denotation, connotation, and myth; 2. The signs that are found in the Balenciaga advertisement, namely a child standing in a room with various objects, a woman covered with tape, two pairs of worn-out shoes, three types of trash bag colors, and three types of high-heeled crocs colours. The denotation, connotation, and myth meanings revealed led to an interpretation of each ad; 3. Each Balenciaga advertisement has an interpretation, although they use unusual or strange signs to attract attention. They trying to convey a message of peace, addressing social inequality, and sustainability with the principle of recycle. However, there are several signs that regrettable because they allude to sexual issues (BDSM) by using children as role models, which is inappropriate. In other words, these signs on Balenciaga advertisements represent sexuality issues, environmental issues, war issues, and poverty issues.

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