

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL SIGNS IN QUAKER ADVERTISEMENTS: A SEMIOTIC STUDY

I Kadek Kariada¹⁾, I Made Yogi Marantika²⁾
 Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar^{1) 2)}
 Indonesia
 Email address: yogimarantika@unmas.ac.id²

Abstract

This study investigates the use of verbal and non-verbal signs in Quaker advertisements, focusing on oatmeal and cereal products. The study was motivated by the lack of scholarly attention given to health-oriented food advertisements, compared to more commonly studied categories such as fast food and cosmetics. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study applied semiotic analysis based on Saussure's and Barthes' theories to examine two advertisement images retrieved from Instagram, a widely used platform for product promotion. Data collection was conducted through observation of verbal elements, including written texts, slogans, health claims, and product descriptions, alongside non-verbal elements such as imagery, colors, typography, brand logos, and layout. The results show that verbal signs primarily highlight product identity, nutritional value, novelty, and credibility, while non-verbal signs reinforce freshness, vitality, tradition, and emotional appeal. For instance, the Puffed Granola advertisement emphasizes naturalness and balance through imagery of apples, cinnamon, blueberries, and calm packaging colors, while the Fruit Fusion advertisement employs a bold red background, fruit visuals, and health claims to associate oatmeal with vitality and modern wellness. At the connotative and mythic levels, both advertisements extend beyond product information, embedding Quaker products into broader cultural narratives of healthy living, lifestyle enhancement, and brand heritage. This study concludes that verbal and non-verbal elements work synergistically to construct persuasive meanings in health food advertising.

Keywords: semiotics, advertisements, verbal signs, non-verbal signs

Introduction

The study of semiotics concerns with how signs produce meaning. It investigates how concept are represented by language and symbols, as well as how people understand these signals in daily life. **Saussure (1983)** believes that a sign is made up of two fundamental components that serve as the foundation for communication: the signifier, which is a physical form such as words, images, or sounds, and the signified, which is a connected concept. Semiotic analysis further differentiates how meaning is communicated and conveyed through various modes, namely verbal and non-verbal signs

In semiotic analysis, verbal and nonverbal signs constitute fundamental categories. Verbal signs use written or spoken language, such as words, slogans, or texts, to convey specific messages. Images, colors, typography, layouts, and gestures that naturally arouse feelings are examples of non-verbal cues. Images are frequently easier to understand instinctively than words, according to **Dyer (2008)**.

Barthes (1977) proposes two layers of meaning: connotation (the cultural and emotional associations that build upon denotation) and denotation (the literal, direct interpretation shared universally). These levels interact intimately in advertising, as non-verbal cues like warm hues associated with health strengthen implicit appeals and verbal features like slogans convey explicit promises. Thus, advertisements serve as an example of this integration,

as slogans, text, images, layouts, and colors all work together to influence viewers. For example, in Quaker oatmeal advertisements, statements like “Start Right with Quaker” serve as verbal cues that are reinforced by non-verbal cues such images of golden oats, pictures of lively families, and earthy tones that suggest sustenance and energy.

Several studies have previously explored the use of semiotics in advertising communication. **Solikhah (2017)** analyzed verbal and non-verbal signs in Magnum ice cream advertisements using Saussure’s semiotic theory, focusing on how denotation and connotation affect audience interpretation. Second study was conducted by **Putri et al. (2022)** who investigated Garnier Men commercials, noting how non-verbal cues like stance, color utilization, and facial expressions support verbal cues like slogans and descriptive phrases. This study demonstrated how language and visual presentation interacted to simultaneously communicate masculinity and freshness. The last study was conducted by **Andriani and Marantika (2024)** who analyzed verbal and non-verbal signs in harassment awareness posters using a semiotic approach. The study applied Saussure’s theory to identify signs, Barthes’ theory to interpret denotative and connotative meanings, and Cerrato’s color theory to support the analysis of visual elements. The findings revealed that non-verbal signs were more dominant than verbal signs, indicating that visual elements such as images, symbols, and colors play a more significant role in conveying messages and influencing audience perception. The study also showed that verbal signs provide clear and direct messages, while non-verbal signs enhance emotional impact and strengthen the effectiveness of awareness campaigns.

This study fills a significant gap in the literature and addresses Indonesia's expanding wellness demands by drawing on three earlier studies. Previous studies have tended to focus on other sectors like beverages, cosmetics, and awareness while giving health-focused products like Quaker less attention. Furthermore, few studies have looked at the comprehensive relationship between verbal and nonverbal components in the context of health efforts, where ethics and trust are crucial. Building on previous discoveries, this study is driven by the question: How are verbal and nonverbal cues constructed and interpreted in Quaker oatmeal and cereal advertisements? As a result, the goals are to: (1) identify verbal elements (like slogans and claims) and non-verbal elements (such visuals and colors); (2) use Barthes' framework to examine their denotative and connotative meanings; and (3) show how they persuasively work together to promote health. This study intends to provide fresh perspectives on consumer influence, cultural narratives of wellness, and meaning-making processes in Quaker's Indonesian marketing setting by concentrating on the integrated semiotics of health ads.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to analyze the verbal and non-verbal signs contained in selected Quaker Oats advertisements. A qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to describe, interpret, and explain the meaning without manipulating the data. In line with **Stake (2010)**, qualitative research emphasizes human perception, personal experience, and interpretation, making it suitable for examining how meaning is constructed through both language and visual elements.

The data of this study consisted of two Quaker Oats advertisement, specifically one promoting oatmeal and one promoting cereal products. These advertisements were purposively selected based on their rich use of verbal and non-verbal elements and their relevance to health-oriented food promotion. The data were obtained from Instagram, a widely used social media platform that functions as a major medium for brand promotion and audience engagement.

The data collection method applied in this study was observation. The researcher systematically examined the selected advertisements through several steps: (1) selecting two advertisements based on the richness of their verbal and visual elements, (2) identifying verbal signs such as slogans, taglines, and product descriptions, as well as non-verbal signs including images, colors, typography, layout, and brand logos, and (3) taking notes and classifying the identified signs into categories for further analysis.

In analyzing the data, this study adopted the framework proposed by **Miles et al. (2014)**, which includes three stages:

1. Data Condensation

Data condensation was conducted by selecting and focusing on relevant verbal and non-verbal elements found in the Quaker Oats advertisements.

2. Data Display

The identified verbal and visual signs were presented in a structured form.

3. Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The researcher interpreted the findings to reveal both literal and deeper meanings of the signs. The conclusions were continuously verified to ensure consistency and validity of interpretation. In this stage, Saussure's (1983) theory was applied to identify the signifier and signified elements in both verbal and non-verbal signs. Second, Barthes's (1977) theory was used to interpret the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in the advertisements.

Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

This study is derived from a semiotic analysis of two Quaker advertisements: Quaker Quaker Puffed Granola and Oatmeal Fruit Fusion. The findings are presented based on the identification of verbal and non-verbal signs, their denotative and connotative meanings, and the overall myths constructed. The analysis process involved breaking down textual and visual elements in each advertisement, then interpreting them according to Barthes' (1977) semiotic framework.

In addition, this analysis is grounded in the semiotic theory of Saussure (1983), who conceptualizes a sign as consisting of two inseparable components: the signifier (form of the sign, such as words, images, or sounds) and the signified (the concept or meaning it represents). In this study, verbal elements such as product names and slogans function as signifiers that point to certain conceptual meanings (signified), while visual elements such as colors, images, and layouts also operate as signifiers that evoke particular associations. These sign relations are further analyzed through Roland Barthes' expansion of semiotics into two levels of signification: denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (associated cultural meaning), as well as myth as a broader ideological message.

a. Quaker Puffed Granola Advertisement



Figure 1. Quaker Advertisement: Puffed Granola

1) Verbal Signs

The verbal signs include:

- Product name “PUFFED GRANOLA” (both variants).
- Flavor indicators: “APPLE CINNAMON” and “BLUEBERRY VANILLA.”
- The phrase “FLAVOR WITH OTHER NATURAL FLAVORS.”
- Health-related claims: “36G WHOLE GRAINS” (Apple Cinnamon), “40g Whole Grains” (Blueberry Vanilla), “GOOD SOURCE OF FIBER” (Blueberry Vanilla), and “CONTAINS 7G TOTAL FAT PER SERVING” (Blueberry Vanilla).
- Promotional words: “NEW!” and “UNIQUE LIGHT & CRISPY TEXTURE.”

From Saussure’s perspective, these verbal elements act as signifiers that point to specific signified concepts such as health, nutrition, and product innovation. At the denotative level, these verbal signs provide essential product information including name, nutritional value, and flavor variants. At the connotative level, they emphasize novelty, nutritional credibility, and distinct sensory experience, positioning the granola as a modern choice for both taste and health.

2) Non-Verbal Signs

The non-verbal signs include:

- Slices of apple and cinnamon sticks (Apple Cinnamon variant).
- Vanilla flower and dried blueberries (Blueberry Vanilla variant).
- Scattered granola flakes with dried fruit around the bowls, reinforcing the product’s wholesome identity.
- The blue patterned background decorated with blueberry and vanilla motifs.

- e) The green packaging (Apple Cinnamon) connotes freshness and natural quality, while the blue packaging (Blueberry Vanilla) symbolizes calmness, reliability, and fruit-based flavor.
- f) Both bowls contain granola with milk inside, but without exaggerated milk splashes, emphasizing realism over dramatization.

These visual elements function as signifiers that signify natural ingredients and freshness. At the denotative level, these visuals identify ingredients and highlight freshness. At the connotative level, they build associations with nature, balance, and authenticity. The myth created here, in Barthes' sense, suggests that Quaker granola is a trustworthy, health-conscious, and contemporary breakfast option that allows consumers to enjoy both flavor and wellness.

b. Quaker Fruit Fusion Advertisement



Figure 1. Quaker Advertisement: Fruit Fusion

1) Verbal Signs

The verbal signs include:

- a) Product name "Fruit Fusion INSTANT OATMEAL."
- b) Flavor indicator: "RASPBERRY STRAWBERRY" with the phrase "FLAVOR WITH OTHER NATURAL FLAVORS."
- c) Nutritional and health claims: "HELP BUILD & MAINTAIN STRONG BONES WITH A GOOD SOURCE OF VITAMIN D & CALCIUM," "NO COLORS FROM ARTIFICIAL SOURCES," and "HEART HEALTHY."
- d) Promotional words: "NEW" and "YOUR OATS JUST GOT A GLOW UP."
- e) Serving suggestion disclaimer: "FRESH FRUIT TOPPING ADDED AS SERVING SUGGESTION."

From Saussure's (1983) framework, these linguistic elements serve as signifiers that construct meanings related to health, modernity, and lifestyle. At the denotative level, these verbal elements inform about product identity, flavor, and health benefits. At the connotative level, they highlight innovation, authenticity, and a promise of modern lifestyle appeal, framing oatmeal not just as food but as a trendy, health-driven choice.

2) Non-Verbal Signs

The non-verbal signs include:

- a) The Quaker logo, with the iconic Quaker man symbol, alongside the text "QUAKER – ESTD 1877," emphasizing brand heritage and reliability.
- b) A red bowl filled with oatmeal topped with raspberries and strawberries, directly reflecting the flavor while evoking freshness and indulgence.
- c) A dominant red background, which connotes energy, passion, and health, making the product visually striking.
- d) Additional strawberry and peach slices placed at the bottom, symbolizing natural ingredients and authenticity.
- e) A heart-shaped icon accompanying "HEART HEALTHY," visually reinforcing the health claim.

These visual components act as signifiers that evoke concepts of vitality, freshness, and tradition. At the denotative level, these visuals highlight flavor identity and the presence of real fruit. At the connotative level, the combination of red tones and fruit imagery creates associations with vitality, freshness, and well-being. The myth presented suggests that Quaker oatmeal is not only nutritious but also modern, stylish, and aligned with personal health goals.

2. Discussion

The analysis of the two Quaker advertisements reveals that verbal and non-verbal signs work together to construct specific meanings about health, lifestyle, and product appeal. From Saussure's perspective, both types of signs operate as interconnected systems of signifiers and signifieds that produce meaning through their relationships. Barthes' framework further explains how these meanings move beyond literal interpretation into cultural and ideological significance.

In Figure 1, the verbal elements such as "Apple Cinnamon," "Blueberry Vanilla," "NEW!," "36g Whole Grains," "40g Whole Grains," "Contains 7g Total Fat per Serving," and "Unique Light & Crispy Texture" serve a denotative function by providing information about product identity, nutritional content, and flavor options. At the connotative level, these phrases emphasize credibility, variety, and innovation, positioning the cereal as both enjoyable and health-oriented. Similarly, in Figure 2, the verbal signs such as "Fruit Fusion," "Instant Oatmeal," "Strawberry Peach," "No colors from artificial sources," and "Help maintain healthy immune function with a good source of Vitamin C, D, and Zinc" operate at a denotative level to communicate product features. Connotatively, they highlight naturalness, safety, and health benefits, linking the consumption of oatmeal to improved immunity and overall wellness.

The non-verbal elements across both advertisements strongly reinforce these verbal messages. In Figure 1, the imagery of sliced apples, cinnamon sticks, vanilla flowers, and scattered dried fruits surrounding granola bowls emphasizes freshness, natural ingredients, and

a direct connection to the listed flavors. The absence of exaggerated splashes of milk and the presence of granola immersed in milk connote realism and simplicity, suggesting that the product fits into daily routines without artificial enhancement. Meanwhile, the green and blue packaging conveys freshness, calmness, and reliability, while the patterned background with motifs of blueberries and vanilla leaves enhances the natural imagery. In Figure 2, the non-verbal signs include the iconic Quaker logo featuring William Penn, a red bowl filled with oats and fruit slices, and a bold red background. The Quaker logo reinforces trust, tradition, and heritage, while the vibrant red background suggests energy, warmth, and vitality. The peach and strawberry slices visually strengthen the flavor claim and create a direct link to freshness and fruitfulness.

At the myth level, as proposed by Barthes, these elements combine to create broader cultural meanings. Figure 1 constructs a myth of modern, balanced living where healthy eating is associated with both enjoyment and trustworthiness. The granola is not just positioned as food but as part of a lifestyle, that emphasizes naturalness, variety, and satisfaction. Figure 2 constructs a myth that connects tradition and innovation. By combining the historic Quaker identity with fresh fruit and claims of immune support, the advertisement suggests that oatmeal is both timeless and modern, blending heritage with contemporary health needs. The promotional emphasis on “NEW” further suggests lifestyle enhancement, positioning oatmeal not only as a food item but also as part of aspirational self-care and wellness routines.

When comparing both advertisements, it becomes clear that Quaker uses a consistent semiotic strategy: anchoring nutritional claims with strong visual associations of fruit, freshness, and tradition. However, each advertisement tailors its emphasis differently. Figure 1 foregrounds naturalness and variety through its calming blue and green tones, while Figure 2 uses bold red tones to foreground vitality, energy, and immune health. This contrast reflects how Quaker adapts its brand image to multiple consumer needs: one focused on balance and freshness, and the other on vitality and protection. Together, these findings illustrate how verbal and non-verbal signs interact as systems of signification to construct layered meanings that go beyond mere product descriptions, embedding Quaker products into broader discourses of health, tradition, and lifestyle.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that verbal and non-verbal signs in Quaker advertisements are strategically combined to communicate nutritional credibility, lifestyle appeal, and brand reliability. In the Puffed Granola advertisement, verbal elements such as “36g Whole Grains,” “40g Whole Grains,” and “Unique Light & Crispy Texture,” along with non-verbal cues like fruit imagery and calm blue-green tones, construct meanings of freshness, balance, and natural quality. In the Fruit Fusion advertisement, verbal signs such as “Your oats just got a glow up,” which reflects modern lifestyle appeal, “Help maintain healthy immune function with essential nutrients,” and “No colors from artificial sources,” reinforced by the bold red background, fruit slices, and the iconic Quaker logo, highlight vitality, energy, and heritage. At the connotative and mythic levels, both advertisements associate Quaker products not merely with food consumption but with broader cultural values such as modern wellness, lifestyle enhancement, self-care, and trust in tradition. This shows that health-oriented

advertising employs semiotic strategies to construct persuasive and layered meanings, embedding everyday food products into aspirational lifestyles.

Although this study has provided insights into the semiotic construction of meaning in Quaker advertisements, it was limited to two images obtained from social media. The findings may not represent the full spectrum of Quaker's advertising strategies across different media or cultures. Future studies are recommended to expand the data by analyzing a wider variety of advertisements, including video commercials and cross-cultural campaigns, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of semiotics in health food promotion. Additionally, further research could combine semiotic analysis with audience reception studies to explore how consumers interpret and respond to these signs in practice.

References

- Andriani, N. K. K., & Marantika, I. M. Y. (2024). A semiotic analysis of verbal and non-verbal signs in harassment awareness posters. *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 10(3), 1057-1066.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). Hill and Wang.
- Dyer, G. (2008). *Advertising as communication*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Saussure, F. de. (1983). *Course in general linguistics* (R. Harris, Trans.). Duckworth.
- Solikhah, I. (2017). *A Semiotic Analysis in 10 Magnum Advertisements: Ferdinand de Saussure Theory*. Unpublished thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. The Guilford Press.
- Putri, K. D. A., Santika, I. G. A., & Pratiwi, P. A. E. (2022). Verbal and non-verbal signs in Garnier Men advertisements. *Jurnal Santiaji Pendidikan*, 12(2), 138-144.