

Semiotics of Publicity Discourse and Influence Techniques on Receivers

Ban Amin al-Rubai'i¹

Abstract

" publicity " has a special semiotics that makes it an influential mean of effective intercommunication based on drawing attention to achieve a benefit that may be economic, social or intellectual. Advertising discourses - especially those related to cultures - have become of a deep intellectual dimension. In view of the mechanisms of influence and persuasion that advertising has, not only at the level of the individual, but also at the level of public opinion, In this regard, the research will present some types of advertising discourses to reveal the means and mechanisms adopted to raise their advertising value, which in turn increases the effectiveness of influence.

Keywords: Semiotics, Receivers, intercommunication.

Introduction

Before delving into the study topic, it is necessary to provide a brief definition of some concepts directly related to the research topic. These include:

- Semiotics (السيمياء in Arabic): The term "السيمياء" in Arabic is derived from the verb "وَسَمَ," which means leaving a trace or mark on something. It is also derived from the verb "سَوَّمَ." Both verbs refer to "sign" (Ibn Manzur: 1414, Wasm 12/635, Sowm 12/312). This meaning is also mentioned in the Quran, where it states: "The criminals will be known by their marks" (Ar-Rahman: 14) and "Marked at their foreheads" (Adh-Dhariyat: 34). The Western term "semiology" is composed of "semeion," which means sign in Greek, and "Logos," which means speech or science. Based on this, semiotics is the "science of signs." This field was established by the Swiss de Saussure (1913) and the American Charles Sanders Peirce (1914) (Jabouri, 2014: 52).

The sign or "representamen" is something that stands for or represents something else in a certain form. It is a tangible reality associated with another reality that it is assumed to suggest (Qasim, 2014: 62). According to Peirce, a sign has three components (representamen, interpretant or interpreter, and object), making it triadic rather than dyadic like in Saussure's model (signifier - signified). The object, the last component, is the thing that the sign represents. Peirce classified signs based on their relationship to their objects into three types (Qasim, 2014: 62; Clinkenbeard, 2015: 177-178):

- Iconic: Based on the law of similarity, as seen in maps, photographs, and graphics.
- Indexical: Based on the law of contiguity or association, as seen in smoke, which is an indexical sign of fire.

¹ College of Education, University of Samarra, Iraq, Ban.amin@uosamarra.edu.iq

- Symbolic: Based on social agreement and convention, as in words that we conventionally use to name things. For example, a dove is a symbolic sign representing peace, and the flags of countries that represent one nation by another.

The signs belonging to social signs are divided into two main categories (Mubarak, 1987: 22-24):

Verbal: Reliant on language and can be further categorized into written and spoken verbal signs.

Non-verbal: Those not relying on words. They include natural signs like facial expressions and disease symptoms (e.g., red face as a sign of fever), sensory signs related to smell, visual signs represented by images, clothing, color, and caricatures, as well as taste signs related to food. There are also cultural or institutional signs (studied by semiotics of culture) related to social behavior norms, rituals, customs, religions, and myths (Mubarak, 1987: 87).

1. Publicity (الإشهار in Arabic):

The term "الإشهار" in Arabic is derived from the root "شَهَرَ," which means to make something clear or prominent. Linguistically, it means clarity and announcement (Ibn Manzur: 1414, 4/432-433 (شهر)). In terminology, it refers to a communicative method that operates in a human environment to facilitate the dissemination of ideas on one hand, and to facilitate the economic relationships between individuals in promoting their goods on the other hand (Suleiman, 2015: 22). However, publicity has transcended the boundaries of commercial communication to become a tool for broader communication, such as social or political communication (Cattolaa, 2012: 32). It serves as an intermediary between a producer and a receiver, indicating a persuasive communication strategy using various human communication means including words, images, and symbols to influence the receiver economically, socially, or aesthetically (Benkrad, 2009: 45). Publicity can occur through television, radio, magazines, the internet, etc. Some differentiate between "propaganda" and "Publicity". While advertising is a part of publicity, it is not inherently commercial like publicity, which is primarily a consumption-oriented process whose products change temporally and spatially. Publicity is linked to ideas defended by its proponents, as it represents fixed ideologies and establishes a broader institutional project, which may be political or religious (Suleiman, 2015: 23-24).

- 1. Publicity Discourse: In general terms, discourse can take the form of written text or spoken words, as in phone calls and radio, as well as non-verbal signs like gestures in sign language. Advertising discourse is a type of discourse intimately connected with human life. It stands out for its various linguistic, visual, and auditory structures. It is fundamentally founded on the promotion of societal, ethical, and cultural values (Dafah, 2014: 506-510). Due to its wide dissemination, the essence of advertising discourse lies in "persuasion, engagement, and success in communication and delivery" (Suleiman, 2015: 29).

Persuasion Techniques in Publicity Discourse:

One of the most important features that make discourse persuasive and influential in Publicity communication includes:

- Information, or "information value," is a crucial aspect of Publicity discourse. The newer and more innovative the product's concept, the greater its Publicity potential.
- Conciseness, brevity, and semantic density are common characteristics of Publicity phrases. They are often compact, short, and concise with compressed meanings, making efficient use of time (Suleiman, 2015: 64). This characteristic in Publicity discourse turns it into a motivational and alerting tool for a strong and swift response (Ashir, 2006: 145). A prime example of this is in Arabic proverbs where the concise

nature has expanded their reach, making them highly effective across different generations.

- The use of praise in Publicity discourse, when a speaker wants to confer high advertising value to a specific item (a product, idea, or speech), it is necessary to amplify its commendation and present it favorably to the consumer or the recipient of the Publicity message. For instance, if you see a statement written on a book: "The Best Written in Psychology," undoubtedly, the Publicity value of this book will overshadow other books in the field of psychology. This is attributed to the Publicity praise represented by the word "Best." One of the most prominent manifestations of this technique used in Publicity discourse can be found in Arabic poetry. For example, in the verses of Al-Nabigha Al-Dhubyani apologizing to Nu'man bin Mundhir (Al-Nabigha Al-Dhubyani: 1976, 56), the concise and impactful expression is evident in these lines. This contributed to the poem's powerful effect on the recipient, leading to the acceptance of the apology after severe anger and estrangement.
- Using collective pronouns instead of personal pronouns is useful from two perspectives. Firstly, it diminishes the emphasis on individuality and strengthens the collective relationship. Secondly, it makes the matter indisputable. A clear example is a referendum on a specific matter, where you do not consider the opinion of one, but rather the opinion of the collective. This opinion is not open to dispute because it represents the opinion of everyone.
- Common dialect, or the middle layer of language understood by the majority of society, especially in economic advertising.
- Selecting effective expression methods and appropriate tone in verbal advertising.
- Repetition, a powerful emphatic technique that contributes to increasing the receiver's alertness and thus elevates the Publicity value in discourse. This is due to its attractive rhythmic cadence that stirs the recipient's emotions and demands a response to that message (Ahmed, 2010: 122). It's worth noting that repetition is not limited to the verbal aspect, although it is the most prominent; it can also apply to actions or meanings.
- Emphasis on human values that are favored by the human mind and appeal to the soul.

It is important to note that these characteristics do not necessarily have to be present in all advertising discourse to make it convincing and influential. Sometimes, the presence of some of these features is sufficient to achieve that impact.

2. Examples of Publicity Discourse:

2.1. First: Auditory Publicity Discourse

Some discourses rely heavily on auditory cues and hold high advertising value. For instance, music, such as national anthems, and accompanying music for sad scenes, fall within the realm of advertising discourse. Additionally, rhythm plays an important role in speech and in conveying intent. Therefore, rhythm is considered one of the Publicity discourse techniques that often support verbal communication. A prime example of the effectiveness of "rhythm" in language can be observed in sellers who promote their products with a specific tone. This rhythm takes on a different form in sports commentators, for example. They deliberately emphasize certain parts of words or elongate them to express victory or defeat in a match. When a goal is scored, they pronounce it with a long, high-pitched tone (Goooooal), which has an impact on the audience and becomes the Publicity symbol that prompts them to erupt in loud cheers and applause. Rhythm in speech can also serve as a simulation of the speaker's psychological state. Let's consider this utterance:

"He was present. Was he present? He was present!"

Through the spoken word, we can anticipate the speaker's state and infer their intention from the vocal tone accompanying the utterance. We understand that the first is a statement, the second is a question, and the third expresses astonishment, with the last two lacking any indicators of interrogative or exclamatory intent.

2.2. Second: Visual Publicity Discourse

Visual Publicity signs are a means of visual communication, such as images in advertisements, or colors like traffic signal colors, where each color signifies a specific condition understood by the driver. This also includes caricatures (Benkrad, 2012: 136). One of the most prominent forms of visual Publicity in our recent era was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, with images of masks and gloves. Their Publicity impact was significant on a societal level, as they influenced people's behavior by encouraging them to wear them. This had both health and moral implications, as they were seen as protective measures. Here are some images that serve as visual signs, each conveying its own specific advertising message intended for the community.



2.3. Third: Linguistic Publicity Discourse

Most discourses, especially Publicity ones, are keen on how they can be effective on the receivers, thus achieving their communicative goals, regardless of whether the aim of this discourse is praiseworthy or unseemly. The following are two different advertising discourses: The first: when Allah says, "O you who have believed, shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment? (It is that) you believe in Allah and His Messenger and strive in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That is best for you, if you should know. He will forgive for you your sins and admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence. That is the great attainment." (Al-Saff: 10-12). In this, there are various Publicity techniques:

- Achieving the emotional function by arousing the addressee's emotions through enticing them with the prospect of gain and success in contrast to loss in trade.
- Declaring noble values expressed as advice in an interrogative style. Here, two goals are achieved simultaneously: offering a choice, not an imposition, and creating intrigue.
- Using the verb "I guide you," which, by its linguistic nature, implies guidance from confusion, misguidance, and bewilderment.
- Creating intrigue and allure by mentioning elements that naturally appeal to human nature (gardens, rivers, pleasant dwellings), formulated in the plural form, indicating unlimited bliss.

The second: Deceptive Linguistic Publicity Discourse, exemplified in Satan's address to Adam: "Satan said, 'O Adam, shall I direct you to the tree of eternity and possession that will not deteriorate?'" (Ta-Ha: 120), and His saying: "And he swore (by Allah) to them,

'Indeed, I am to you from among the sincere advisors.' So he made them fall, through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the leaves of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, 'Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy?'" (Al-A'raf: 20-21). Iblis attempted to craft a deceitful Publicity discourse using effective methods and techniques. His discourse included an implicit (unannounced) goal of leading Adam into disobedience, and an announced goal of achieving eternal life by eating from the tree. The persuasive means in his Publicity discourse can be summarized (Suleiman, 2015: 33-34):

- Provoking the addressee's emotions (Adam) by frightening him with death and poverty.
- Declaring noble values that clarify the purpose of the discourse, presented in the form of advice.
- Establishing closeness by addressing the addressee by name. This falls within the principle of "friendliness" in the principles of refining discourse. It also serves as a means to convince the addressee of the validity of the plea and to counter any denial.
- Using the question format outside the context of advice and guidance, to achieve the goals of friendliness and intrigue ("Shall I direct you?"). Also, using the verb "I guide you" to imply that the addressee - based on the semantic value of the verb "guide" - is guided and advised. Since this deceptive discourse was highly effective and impactful, its result was the receiver's acceptance, manifesting in compliance with the advice and eating from the tree.

There are some advertising discourses that integrate multiple Publicity techniques to enhance their impact on the addressee. One of the linguistic advertising discourses that evokes visual imagery is when Allah says, "On the Day (some) faces will turn white and (some) faces will turn black. As for those whose faces turn black, (to them it will be said), 'Did you disbelieve after your belief? Then taste the punishment for what you used to reject.'" (Al-Imran: 106-107). Also, His saying, "And on the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied about Allah (with) their faces blackened." (Az-Zumar: 60). The two words ("white" and "black") are linguistic signs, and since they are colors, they also evoke visual signs in the mind. The word "white" is a sign that brings to mind various connotations such as light, purity, clarity, optimism, joy, tranquility, and is thus associated with the people of Paradise. As for "black," it carries multiple connotations such as dislike, sorrow, hatred, gloom, punishment, annihilation... and is associated with disbelievers to suit them.

2.4. Fourth: Caricature Publicity Discourse

Caricature discourse is part of the social life of society, reflecting its ideas and concerns. "Caricature" is a term derived from the Italian word (*caricatura*), which means exaggeration or satire. It is a method of representation through drawing, portraying people or things in a humorous manner characterized by peculiar and comical distortions, aiming to highlight negative aspects. It is primarily a visual discourse based on a combination of lines, colors, and shapes. It can also be linguistic and visual when the linguistic component merges with the visual or iconic component (image). This discourse often incorporates many social and cultural ideologies, critiquing reality. Due to its depiction of reality, it serves a communicative purpose. It is sometimes associated with ethical considerations that require the recipient to recognize and value the principles presented in that discourse, both materially and morally. However, it may lose its noble social goals to achieve other objectives. A prominent example of the impact of this type of caricature discourse on recipients is the emotional response generated by offensive caricatures of the noble Prophet (peace be upon him) by the Danish artist Kurt Westergaard, as well as by the Swedish artist Lars Vilks. While they achieved their

advertising goals among those who believed in those ideas, they caused a reverse advertising effect for their creator. The value of the product (the idea) was diminished, as it undermined the established values for a large segment of society. One manifestation of its reverse Publicity effect was the millions of people from Arab and Islamic countries who protested against these practices that fueled animosity between peoples and religions. Below is an example of a caricature image (visual-linguistic) opposing the idea of offensive caricatures.



2.5. Fifth: Cultural Publicity Discourse:

Publicity discourse is valued for its high informational value, given its influence on the audience, and its representation of diverse cultures, ideologies, and orientations, intellectually, scientifically, and ethically (Ibrir, 2002: 63). Everything produced in human phenomena essentially serves a fundamental purpose: the desire to communicate openly or implicitly. Therefore, diverse cultures are nothing more than a continuous communicative process (Benkrad, 2004: 3).

As a clear example of the value of cultural Publicity discourse, we will present some advertising signs in the phenomenon of Ashura, which is a culturally significant event. It maintains its temporal permanence and the continuity of its communication in the collective memory of the community due to its cultural advertising value.

The multiple Publicity signs, containing encoded messages in this culture, play the role of stimuli for the recipients' responses. Among these are the visual signs (visual imagery) in this ritual, sometimes represented by the million-person march, which is considered an iconic sign. It is based, in some of its aspects, on the similitude relationship between a historical event and what the culture represents today. The similarity between the image and the thing it represents is the result of this cultural practice. "Culture cements past experiences through memory or commemorative production" (Mubarak, 1987: 87). Establishing a cultural-linguistic relationship between the sign and its subject, it becomes a cultural-linguistic relationship. Thus, the Publicity value of these rituals expands to present a cultural discourse that defines the identity of the community on one hand, and reinforces that behavior as a belief on the other. Furthermore, it presents a semiotic discourse encoded with the history of these cultures.

If we want to activate the semiotic reading of the other visual signs in this culture, we are faced with a huge amount of signs that carry in their interpretations a formulation of that culture. If we contemplate the selected or predominant colors in these rituals, we find that black and red dominate the clothing, flags, banners, inscriptions, and writings. These two colors have a special semiotics in Arab culture, "Color perception is fundamentally cultural" (Benkrad, 2012: 149). Black is a visual sign that evokes interpretations of sadness, death, grief, and was chosen as a symbolic sign of mourning, knowing that this choice over others is subject to cultural context, which is well known to members of the community (Jubouri, 2014: 45). As for "red", it is a visual sign that elicits a natural,

provocative, attention-grabbing reaction suggesting danger or loss (Siza Qasim, 2014: 415). In this cultural context, "red" becomes a complementary sign for the interpretations of black. It makes the recipient deduce that this death was a killing signaled by the semiotic sign (blood) associated with the color "red" by a relationship of resemblance. Culturally, this sign transforms from an iconic sign to a sign of identity. In Arab culture, it symbolizes the revenge that was not taken, or the war that did not end. The linguistic sign combined with the visual sign to activate the advertising value of cultural discourse. We find written on a black or red banner ("Labbaik Daa'i Allah"), so the recipient is faced with two stimuli: one visual, representing the color "black" or "red" with all its interpretations gathered in the recipient's mind, and the other linguistic, represented by the word of response ("Labbaik"). With the presence of this word, it calls for recalling a familiar visual scene in the Muslim culture, which is the scene of pilgrimage. This implies a doctrinal connection between this ritual and the belief in answering the call of "Daa'i Allah". Thus, we are in front of a deeper semiotic reading of this Publicity, which is that revenge or "justice" should be carried out exclusively by the family of the victim, and based on this, the entire scene establishes the idea of the "appearance" or "awaiting" of the legitimate heir to this right. This is a deeply rooted belief in the thought and culture of the community. This mental invocation of the highest values and ideals in this ritual stimulates the recipient and leads him to believe in the legitimacy of this Publicity message and to accept it intellectually and doctrinally.

The Publicity value in such rituals is not limited to commemorating a historical event only but also to affirming the commitment of the community members to it in the future. In other words, it cements that idea and makes it applicable in subsequent times. Every culture has its manifestations that preserve its temporal extension in the memory of the community, ensuring its perpetuity (Lotman and Uspensky, 2014: 335).

Conclusion

- Publicity is a consumptive process with non-permanent validity. It is in constant change due to its susceptibility to factors like time, place, or society.
- The impact value of the Publicity message increases when both linguistic and visual components merge to convey the idea of the discourse. This is evident in cartoons, as well as advertisements that contain political and social dimensions.
- There are diverse methods of persuasion or influence in Publicity discourse, the most prominent being highlighting the positive aspect of the product. However, these methods are not governed by strict rules; their value is derived from their acceptability among the consumer group, which varies from one society to another.
- The goal implied by advertising discourse does not diminish its Publicity nature. The discourse may be Publicity even if it is false or deceptive.
- Cultural Publicity is considered one of the most powerful forms of Publicity discourse. This is because it is fundamentally based on cementing beliefs and ideas in collective memory, which ensures its communicative permanence over time.
- Publicity can be promotional if it acquires a promotional goal, meaning it shifts from commercial utility to institutional utility. This is mostly available in cultural Publicity discourse.

References

Holy Quran

- [1] Abdel Rahman, Shadi. (2000-2001). *Symbolic Dimensions of the Caricature Image in National Press: A Semiological Analytical Study of Models from "Al Youm" and "Al Khabar"*

- Newspapers (Master's Thesis). University of Algiers, Faculty of Political Science and Communication.
- [2] Acheer, Abdel Salam. (2006). *When We Communicate, We Change (A Discursive Cognitive Approach to Communication and Argumentation Mechanisms)*. East Africa, Morocco.
- [3] Al-Aleimat, Fatima Mohammed. (2017). *Approaches in Analyzing Caricature Discourse*. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, Volume 44, Issue 1.
- [4] Al-Dhubyani, al-Nabigha, edited by Muhammad al-Tahir bin Ashur. (1976). *Diwan al-Nabigha al-Dhubyani*. Published and Printed by Tunisian Company for Publishing - Tunisia, and National Company for Publishing and Distribution - Algeria.
- [5] Benkrad, Said. (2004). *Communication Strategies from Verbal to Gestural*. *Alamat Magazine*, Morocco, Issue 21.
- [6] Benkrad, Said. (2009). *Advertising Image and Mechanisms of Persuasion and Signification*. Arab Cultural Center, Casablanca - Morocco.
- [7] Benkrad, Said. (2012). *Semiotics: Concepts and Applications*. Dar Al-Hiwar, Syria, 3rd edition.
- [8] Cattola, Bernard. (2012). *Advertising and Society*, translated by Said Benkrad. Dar Al-Hiwar for Publishing and Distribution, Syria, 1st edition.
- [9] Daffa, Belqassem. (2014). *The Rhetoric of Argumentation Strategy: A Discursive Study in Arabic Advertising Communication*. *Research in Algerian Language and Literature Journal*, Issue Ten.
- [10] Ibrir, Bashir. (2002). *The Rhetoric of Image and the Effectiveness of Influence in Advertising Discourse: A Semiotic and Discursive Perspective (The Second National Symposium on Semiotics and Literary Texts)*. Publications of Mohamed Khider University of Biskra.
- [11] Klinkenberg, Jean-Marie. (2015). *Synopsis of General Semiotics*, translated by Dr. Jamal Haddari. Majd Foundation for University Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st edition.
- [12] Lotman, Yuri, and Uspensky, Boris, translated by Abdel Moneim Taleema. (2014). *On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture*, within the book *(Systems of Signs in Language, Literature, and Culture - An Introduction to Semiotics)*. Dar Al-Tanweer, Beirut - Lebanon, 1st edition.
- [13] Mubarak, Hanoun. (1987). *Lessons in Semiotics*. Dar Tobqal, Casablanca, Morocco, 1st edition.
- [14] Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzur al-Afriqi al-Masri. (1414 AH). *Lisan al-Arab*. Dar Sader, Beirut, 3rd edition.
- [15] Peirce, Charles Sanders, translated by Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul. (2014). *Classification of Signs*, within the book *(Systems of Signs in Language, Literature, and Culture - An Introduction to Semiotics)*. Dar Al-Tanweer, Beirut - Lebanon, 1st edition.
- [16] Qasim, Siza. (2014). *Semiotica about some Concepts and Dimensions within the book (Systems of Signs in Language, Literature, and Culture - An Introduction to Semiotics)*. Dar Al-Tanweer, Beirut - Lebanon, 1st edition.
- [17] Suleiman, Atiya. (2014). *Quranic Advertising and Epistemic Meaning in Light of Epistemic Theory and Discursive Conceptual Blending, (Surah Yusuf as a Model)*. Modern Academy for University Publications, Cairo - Egypt.
- [18] Youssef, Abdel Fattah Ahmed. (1431 AH - 2010). *Linguistics of Discourse and Patterns of Culture (Philosophy of Meaning between Discourse System and Cultural Conditions)*. Dar Al-Arabiya for Scientific Publishers, Beirut - Lebanon, and Al-Ikhtilaf Publications, Algeria, 1st edition.
- [19] Zourata, Nasira. (2013). *Semiotics of Argumentation in Caricature Discourse from Explicit Ridicule to Implicit Inference*. *University of Algiers Annals*, Volume 1, Issue 24.