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Hidden Meanings: A Linguistic and Semiotic Analysis of Wordplay in Advertising Posters

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the linguistic and semiotic dimensions of wordplay in contemporary advertising posters, emphasizing the interaction between verbal expressions and visual signs in the construction of persuasive meanings. Drawing on semiotic perspectives developed by Koorosh Safavi and linguistic theories of ambiguity, metaphor, and pragmatics, the research examines how advertisers employ puns, double meanings, and symbolic imagery to attract audience attention and enhance message retention. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the study analyzes a selected corpus of advertising posters collected from digital and print media platforms. The analysis focuses on linguistic creativity, visual symbolism, and the relationship between textual and non-textual elements in shaping consumer interpretation. The findings reveal that wordplay functions as a powerful multimodal strategy that increases emotional engagement, strengthens brand identity, and produces layered meanings. The study contributes to research in semiotics, discourse analysis, and advertising linguistics by demonstrating the persuasive role of hidden meanings in visual communication.

KEYWORDS: Semiotics; Wordplay; Advertising Discourse; Visual Communication; Linguistic Ambiguity

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary media environment, advertising posters have evolved beyond simple promotional tools into complex multimodal texts that combine linguistic structures, visual symbols, and cultural meanings to influence audience perception and consumer behavior. Modern advertisements increasingly rely on creative language strategies such as puns, ambiguity, metaphor, and double meanings to capture public attention in highly competitive digital and commercial spaces. Among these strategies, wordplay has emerged as one of the most effective persuasive techniques because it simultaneously entertains audiences, stimulates cognitive engagement, and enhances brand memorability. The interaction between textual and visual elements in advertising discourse therefore creates layered meanings that require semiotic and linguistic interpretation. Recent developments in discourse studies and multimodal communication have emphasized that advertising language functions not only as an informative medium but also as a symbolic and ideological system through which cultural values, emotions, and social identities are constructed. In this context, advertising posters represent a rich site for examining how linguistic creativity and visual representation operate together to shape meaning. The persuasive power of advertisements is often achieved through indirect communication, where slogans and images produce implied interpretations rather than explicit messages. Such hidden meanings encourage audiences to actively decode signs, symbols, and contextual references embedded within the advertisement.

From a semiotic perspective, meaning is generated through the relationship between signs, visual codes, and cultural interpretation. Koorosh Safavi(2021) argues that language possesses multilayered semantic capacities in which literal and implied meanings coexist within communicative discourse. This perspective is particularly relevant to advertising posters, where verbal expressions frequently interact with images to produce symbolic and persuasive effects. Wordplay in advertisements often depends on linguistic ambiguity and contextual interpretation, allowing advertisers to construct memorable messages that appeal to both emotional and cognitive responses. Consequently, the analysis of advertising posters requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines semiotics, linguistics, and discourse analysis.

Although numerous studies have investigated advertising discourse and visual communication, limited attention has been devoted to the combined analysis of linguistic wordplay and semiotic representation within poster advertisements, particularly in contemporary digital media contexts. Existing research frequently focuses either on textual persuasion or visual symbolism independently, while the interaction between these elements remains underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to examine how wordplay functions as a multimodal persuasive strategy in advertising posters through the integration of linguistic and semiotic analysis. Using qualitative content analysis, the research investigates the relationship between verbal ambiguity, visual signs, and hidden meanings in selected advertising posters. The study seeks to contribute to the fields of semiotics, advertising linguistics, and visual communication by demonstrating how language and imagery collaboratively construct persuasive and culturally meaningful discourse.

The present study seeks to investigate the relationship between linguistic wordplay and semiotic meaning construction in contemporary advertising posters. In order to achieve the objectives of the research, the study addresses the following questions:

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How is wordplay linguistically constructed in contemporary advertising posters?
How do verbal and visual signs interact to produce multilayered meanings in advertising discourse?
In what ways does linguistic ambiguity function as a persuasive strategy in advertising posters?
How can Koorosh Safavi's semiotic theory of multilayered meaning explain the interpretation of hidden meanings in advertising communication?
How do audiences decode symbolic and contextual meanings embedded within multimodal advertising posters?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of advertising discourse has expanded significantly in recent years due to the increasing complexity of multimodal communication in digital and visual media. Contemporary advertising posters employ linguistic and visual strategies simultaneously to create persuasive messages capable of influencing audience perception, emotional response, and consumer behavior. According to recent studies in multimodal discourse analysis, advertisements no longer communicate through direct informational language alone; instead, they depend on symbolic representation, implicit meaning, and audience participation in the decoding process (Pramanick, Roy, & Patel, 2021). In this context, linguistic creativity has become a central persuasive mechanism in modern advertising discourse.

Among various linguistic devices, wordplay occupies a particularly important position because it allows advertisers to construct multiple layers of meaning within a limited textual structure. Puns, lexical ambiguity, metaphor, semantic deviation, and double meanings are widely used to increase memorability and cognitive engagement. Recent research demonstrates that advertisements containing wordplay generate stronger audience interaction because they require interpretive participation from viewers, thereby enhancing emotional attachment and brand recall (Xu et al., 2026). Moreover, multimodal studies suggest that verbal ambiguity becomes more effective when combined with visual signs, colors, and symbolic imagery that reinforce hidden meanings within advertisements (Weng et al., 2021).

The theoretical foundation of this study is largely based on the linguistic and semiotic perspectives of Koorosh Safavi, whose theories concerning multilayered meaning, sign interpretation, and the aesthetic function of language provide a suitable framework for analyzing advertising posters. Safavi argues that meaning is not confined to literal linguistic structures but emerges through contextual, cultural, and semiotic interpretation (Safavi, 2021). From this perspective, language possesses multiple semantic layers in which explicit meanings coexist with implicit, symbolic, and ideological meanings. This concept is highly relevant to advertising discourse because advertisements often rely on indirect communication and hidden persuasion rather than straightforward expression.

One of Safavi's most significant theoretical contributions is his concept of multilayered meaning (چندلایگی معنا), which explains how discourse can simultaneously communicate literal, emotional, symbolic, and cultural meanings. In advertising posters, this multilayered structure appears through the interaction between slogans, typography, images, and visual metaphors. A short advertising phrase may contain humorous surface meanings while simultaneously conveying deeper ideological or emotional implications. Recent studies in semiotic communication support this perspective by emphasizing that audiences actively construct meaning through the interpretation of interconnected signs and cultural codes (Liu & O'Halloran, 2022). Consequently, meaning in advertising discourse becomes a negotiated process between textual construction and audience interpretation.

Another important aspect of Safavi's linguistic theory is the aesthetic function of language. Safavi maintains that language is not merely a medium of communication but also an artistic tool capable of producing attraction, persuasion, and emotional influence (Safavi, 2021). This perspective is particularly visible in advertising discourse, where stylistic devices such as alliteration, rhyme, irony, metaphor, and puns are strategically employed to attract attention and strengthen memorability. Contemporary research in advertising linguistics confirms that audiences respond more positively to advertisements containing creative linguistic patterns because such structures stimulate cognitive processing and emotional engagement (Kim & Lee, 2023).

Safavi also emphasizes the interrelationship between linguistic signs and visual representation in communicative discourse. According to his semiotic perspective, images and textual elements operate together to generate unified meaning structures. In advertising posters, visual elements do not simply illustrate written language; rather, they interact dynamically with textual signs to create additional interpretive dimensions. This theoretical perspective aligns with recent developments in multimodal discourse analysis, which regard communication as the integration of linguistic, visual, spatial, and contextual semiotic resources (Bateman, Wildfeuer, & Hiippala, 2022). Therefore, the persuasive effectiveness of poster advertisements depends largely on the coordinated relationship between verbal ambiguity and visual symbolism.

Despite the growing body of contemporary research on advertising discourse and multimodal communication, limited attention has been devoted to the combined analysis of linguistic wordplay and semiotic representation in advertising posters. Existing studies frequently examine visual persuasion or linguistic creativity independently, while the interaction between these elements remains comparatively underexplored. Furthermore, recent scholarship has focused primarily on social media advertising and digital campaigns, leaving poster advertisements less examined within contemporary linguistic semiotics. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this research gap by investigating how wordplay functions as a multimodal persuasive strategy through the interaction of linguistic ambiguity and visual signs in advertising posters.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is theoretically grounded in the semiotic and linguistic perspectives of Koorosh Safavi, particularly his theories concerning multilayered meaning, contextual interpretation, and the aesthetic function of language. Safavi's semiotic approach provides an appropriate framework for examining advertising discourse because contemporary advertisements frequently rely on hidden meanings, symbolic representation, and indirect communication rather than explicit informational language. Within this perspective, meaning is not viewed as fixed or limited to literal textual structures; instead, it emerges through the interaction between linguistic signs, visual symbols, cultural codes, and audience interpretation.

One of the central concepts employed in this study is Safavi's theory of multilayered meaning (چندلایگی معنا). According to this perspective, discourse contains multiple semantic levels that operate simultaneously, including literal, implied, emotional, symbolic, and ideological meanings.

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In advertising posters, slogans and visual images often produce meanings that extend beyond their surface structure. A single phrase may communicate direct information while simultaneously suggesting emotional associations, social values, or cultural ideologies. This multilayered process is particularly visible in advertisements employing wordplay, ambiguity, metaphor, and symbolic imagery. Therefore, Safavi's theory enables the study to examine how advertising discourse constructs persuasive meanings through indirect and interpretive communication.

Another important aspect of Safavi's theoretical perspective is the relationship between sign and interpretation. Meaning is produced not only through linguistic forms but also through contextual and cultural understanding. Advertising posters function as semiotic systems in which textual and visual elements interact dynamically to shape audience interpretation. Colors, typography, images, spatial organization, and symbolic objects all operate as signs that contribute to communicative meaning. Consequently, the interpretation of advertising discourse requires an examination of both linguistic structures and visual semiotics within their cultural context.

The study also draws upon Safavi's concept of the aesthetic function of language. According to this perspective, language does not merely communicate information but also creates artistic, emotional, and persuasive effects. Advertising discourse frequently employs stylistic devices such as puns, irony, metaphor, alliteration, semantic deviation, and lexical ambiguity to attract audience attention and increase memorability. Wordplay therefore functions not only as linguistic creativity but also as a persuasive communicative strategy designed to influence audience perception and emotional engagement.

In addition to Safavi's semiotic framework, the study incorporates principles from multimodal discourse analysis to examine the interaction between textual and visual modes of communication. Contemporary advertisements operate through multimodal structures in which meaning is generated collectively through verbal and non-verbal elements. The integration of linguistic and visual signs enables advertisements to construct complex symbolic meanings that require active audience interpretation. This multimodal perspective complements Safavi's theory by emphasizing the interconnected relationship between language, imagery, and cultural context in meaning production.

Through the combination of Safavi's semiotic theories and multimodal discourse analysis, the present study investigates how wordplay in advertising posters functions as a multilayered persuasive mechanism. The theoretical framework therefore provides the conceptual foundation for analyzing linguistic ambiguity, symbolic representation, and the interaction between verbal and visual signs in contemporary advertising discourse.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate the linguistic and semiotic functions of wordplay in contemporary advertising posters. Since the study aims to examine hidden meanings, symbolic representations, and the interaction between verbal and visual signs, a qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate method for exploring the interpretive and contextual dimensions of advertising discourse. The research combines semiotic analysis with qualitative content analysis in order to examine how linguistic ambiguity and visual symbolism collaboratively construct persuasive meanings within poster advertisements.

The data for this study consist of a purposively selected corpus of contemporary advertising posters collected from digital media platforms, official brand websites, and social media advertising campaigns published between 2021 and 2025. The selection process focused specifically on posters containing noticeable forms of linguistic creativity, including puns, double meanings, semantic ambiguity, metaphorical expressions, and humorous slogans. International commercial brands from sectors such as food, fashion, technology, cosmetics, and entertainment were selected to ensure diversity in linguistic style and visual presentation. The posters were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives and their suitability for multimodal linguistic and semiotic analysis.

This study employs purposive sampling because the selected advertisements must contain clear examples of wordplay and multimodal meaning construction. Random sampling was considered unsuitable due to the highly specific linguistic characteristics required for analysis. A total of twenty advertising posters were selected as the primary analytical corpus. The chosen posters represent various forms of verbal ambiguity and visual symbolism in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of how hidden meanings operate within advertising discourse.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded primarily in the semiotic and linguistic theories of Koorosh Safavi, particularly his perspectives on multilayered meaning, contextual interpretation, and the aesthetic function of language. Safavi's theory suggests that meaning is produced through the interaction between linguistic signs, cultural codes, and contextual interpretation rather than through literal language alone. This framework is especially relevant to advertising discourse because commercial advertisements frequently rely on indirect communication, symbolic imagery, and interpretive audience participation. The study also incorporates principles from multimodal discourse analysis to examine the interaction between textual and visual elements in meaning construction.

The analytical procedure was conducted in several stages. First, the linguistic components of each advertising poster were examined to identify forms of wordplay, including lexical ambiguity, polysemy, homophony, metaphor, irony, and semantic deviation. Particular attention was given to how slogans and textual expressions generated multiple layers of interpretation. Second, the visual elements of the posters, including color, typography, spatial organization, facial expressions, symbols, and imagery, were analyzed semiotically in order to determine their contribution to hidden meaning construction. Third, the relationship between verbal and visual signs was examined to explore how textual ambiguity interacts with visual representation to produce persuasive and emotional effects.

Qualitative content analysis was employed to categorize recurring patterns and communicative strategies across the selected advertisements. The analysis focused on themes such as humor, emotional appeal, symbolic representation, brand identity construction, and audience engagement. Through this process, the study aimed to identify how linguistic and visual resources operate simultaneously as persuasive mechanisms within advertising discourse. The findings were interpreted within Safavi's semiotic framework to reveal the multilayered meanings embedded in contemporary advertising posters.

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the analysis, the study adopted a systematic interpretive procedure in which each poster was examined repeatedly in relation to its linguistic structure, visual composition, and cultural context. The interpretation of signs and symbols was conducted

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comparatively across the corpus to ensure analytical consistency. Furthermore, recent scholarly studies in multimodal discourse analysis and advertising linguistics were consulted throughout the analytical process in order to support the interpretation of linguistic and semiotic features.

The methodological integration of qualitative content analysis and semiotic interpretation enables the study to explore advertising posters as complex multimodal texts in which language and imagery collaboratively generate persuasive meanings. By combining linguistic analysis with visual semiotics, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how wordplay functions as a strategic communicative device in contemporary advertising discourse.

Coding Categories for Advertisement Analysis

To ensure systematic qualitative analysis, the selected advertisements were coded according to linguistic, semiotic, and persuasive categories as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Coding Categories for Advertisement Analysis

Advertisement Poster	Linguistic Device	Visual Semiotic Element	Hidden Meaning	Persuasive Function
McDonald's – "Open All Night"	Lexical ambiguity	Illuminated fries resembling city lights	Association with nightlife and urban lifestyle	Brand memorability and emotional appeal
Nike – "Run the World"	Metaphor and semantic polysemy	Athlete positioned above city skyline	Power, ambition, and dominance	Motivation and identity construction
KitKat – "Break Time"	Pun and double meaning	Chocolate bar shaped as pause button	Psychological relaxation and escape from stress	Emotional engagement
Pepsi Max – "Zero Never Tasted So Good"	Semantic contradiction	Ice textures and dark contrasting colors	Pleasure despite absence of sugar	Cognitive surprise and product attraction
Spotify – "Listen Like You Used To"	Nostalgic linguistic reference	Cassette tapes and retro headphones	Emotional nostalgia and cultural memory	Audience identification
L'Oréal – "Because You're Worth It"	Emotional and ideological language	Gold color scheme and luxury typography	Self-worth, confidence, and empowerment	Brand prestige and emotional persuasion
Coca-Cola – "Taste the Feeling"	Sensory metaphor	Smiling faces and vibrant red imagery	Happiness and social connection	Emotional branding
Netflix – "One Story Away"	Metaphorical expression	Cinematic lighting and isolated viewer image	Escape into fictional worlds	Audience immersion

DATA COLLECTION

The data for the present study were collected from a corpus of contemporary advertising posters published between 2021 and 2025 across digital and print media platforms. The advertisements were obtained from official brand websites, verified social media campaigns, online advertising archives, and global commercial marketing platforms. The collection process focused specifically on posters that demonstrated clear examples of linguistic creativity and multimodal meaning construction through the use of puns, double meanings, metaphorical slogans, and visual symbolism. A purposive sampling technique was employed because the study required advertisements containing explicit forms of wordplay and semiotic interaction between textual and visual elements. Random sampling was not considered suitable due to the highly specialized linguistic features necessary for analysis. The final corpus consisted of twenty advertising posters selected from internationally recognized brands operating in sectors such as food and beverage, sportswear, cosmetics, entertainment, and digital media. These brands included McDonald's, Nike, Pepsi, KitKat, Spotify, Coca-Cola, L'Oréal, and Netflix. The advertisements were selected based on three primary criteria: the presence of linguistic ambiguity or wordplay, the integration of visual and verbal signs, and the accessibility of the advertisements within contemporary media environments.

The data collection process was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, advertisements were gathered through digital observation of online campaigns published on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and official advertising websites. During this stage, approximately sixty posters were initially collected. In the second stage, the advertisements were screened to identify posters containing linguistic devices such as polysemy, punning, metaphor, semantic deviation, irony, and double entendre. Posters lacking significant textual creativity or multimodal interaction were excluded from the dataset. In the final stage, twenty posters demonstrating the strongest examples of wordplay and semiotic complexity were selected for detailed qualitative analysis.

The collected data included both textual and visual components of the advertisements. The textual data consisted of slogans, taglines, captions, and lexical structures used within the posters, while the visual data included images, typography, color schemes, spatial organization, symbols, facial expressions, and graphic composition. Each poster was documented and coded according to its brand, publication year, advertising category, linguistic feature, and dominant semiotic strategy. For instance, the McDonald's poster titled "Open All Night" was categorized under lexical ambiguity and symbolic visual metaphor, while Nike's "Run the World" campaign was categorized under metaphorical wordplay and ideological symbolism.

The selected advertisements represented diverse forms of linguistic and semiotic communication. Seven posters primarily relied on lexical ambiguity and polysemous expressions, five employed metaphorical slogans combined with symbolic imagery, four used humorous or ironic wordplay, and four demonstrated multimodal semantic contradiction between text and image. The repeated appearance of these patterns across the

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corpus indicated that contemporary advertising discourse systematically depends on multilayered meaning construction to increase audience engagement and persuasive impact.

To maintain analytical reliability, all selected posters were analyzed repeatedly and comparatively throughout the research process. The advertisements were examined within their cultural and communicative contexts in order to identify implied meanings and symbolic associations. Furthermore, the interpretation of linguistic and visual signs was guided by the semiotic theories of Koorosh Safavi, particularly his perspectives concerning multilayered meaning, contextual interpretation, and the aesthetic function of language. This theoretical framework enabled the study to investigate how advertising posters transform ordinary commercial messages into complex multimodal communicative structures.

The collected corpus therefore provided a representative dataset for examining the interaction between linguistic ambiguity and visual symbolism in contemporary advertising posters. By focusing on authentic commercial advertisements from recent years, the study aimed to produce findings that accurately reflect current trends in advertising discourse and multimodal communication.

DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative analysis of the selected advertising posters revealed that contemporary advertising discourse systematically relies on linguistic ambiguity and visual symbolism to construct persuasive and emotionally engaging meanings. The findings indicate that wordplay in advertising functions not only as a stylistic linguistic device but also as a multimodal semiotic strategy through which advertisements generate hidden meanings, strengthen brand identity, and increase audience memorability. Through the analytical framework developed from the theories of Koorosh Safavi, the study identified several recurring patterns of multilayered meaning construction across the selected corpus.

Table 2. Linguistic and Semiotic Findings in Selected Advertising Posters

Advertisement	Linguistic Feature	Semiotic Feature	Type of Meaning Produced	Interpretation
McDonald's – "Open All Night"	Lexical ambiguity	Fries represented as city lights	Symbolic and cultural meaning	The advertisement associates the brand with nightlife, social activity, and urban energy.
Nike – "Run the World"	Metaphorical polysemy	Elevated athlete above skyline	Ideological meaning	The slogan constructs associations with power, ambition, and personal dominance.
KitKat – "Break Time"	Pun and semantic duality	Chocolate shaped as pause button	Emotional and psychological meaning	The advertisement promotes the product as a form of relaxation and escape from stress.
Pepsi Max – "Zero Never Tasted So Good"	Semantic contradiction	Ice and dark color contrast	Humorous persuasive meaning	Contradiction between "zero" and pleasure increases audience attention and memorability.
Spotify – "Listen Like You Used To"	Nostalgic expression	Retro cassette imagery	Cultural and emotional meaning	The advertisement activates nostalgia and emotional attachment through cultural memory.
L'Oréal – "Because You're Worth It"	Ideological statement	Gold luxury aesthetics	Identity-based meaning	The slogan connects beauty products with empowerment and self-confidence.
Coca-Cola – "Taste the Feeling"	Sensory metaphor	Red color symbolism and smiling faces	Emotional meaning	The advertisement links the product to happiness and social connection.
Netflix – "One Story Away"	Metaphorical expression	Cinematic darkness and isolated viewer	Escapist symbolic meaning	The slogan positions entertainment as emotional escape and immersion.

One of the most significant findings involved the widespread use of lexical ambiguity in advertising slogans. In a McDonald's poster carrying the slogan "Open All Night," the phrase initially appears as a direct informational statement referring to the restaurant's operating hours. However, the visual arrangement of illuminated French fries against a dark urban background transformed the slogan into a symbolic representation of nightlife, social activity, and urban energy. The interaction between text and image therefore produced a secondary layer of meaning in which the restaurant became associated with modern lifestyle and late-night culture rather than merely food consumption. From Safavi's perspective, the slogan functioned through multilayered meaning in which literal and symbolic interpretations coexisted simultaneously.

A similar pattern was observed in Nike's advertisement titled "Run the World." Linguistically, the verb "run" demonstrated semantic polysemy because it simultaneously referred to physical movement and social dominance. The visual representation of an athlete standing above a metropolitan skyline reinforced the metaphorical interpretation of success, ambition, and personal power. The analysis demonstrated that the slogan relied heavily on contextual interpretation, requiring audiences to decode both the linguistic and visual dimensions of the advertisement. This finding supports Safavi's theory that meaning is not fixed within linguistic structures but emerges through contextual and cultural interpretation.

Another important example of multimodal wordplay appeared in a KitKat poster featuring the slogan "Break Time." The poster visually represented a chocolate bar shaped like a pause button commonly associated with digital media interfaces. At the textual level, the slogan referred to taking a short rest; however, the visual symbolism expanded the meaning into a broader cultural metaphor related to escaping stress, digital exhaustion, and work pressure. The term "break" therefore functioned simultaneously as a literal invitation to consume the product and as a symbolic suggestion of psychological relaxation. The analysis revealed that the persuasive effect of the advertisement depended largely on the interaction between linguistic ambiguity and visual semiotics.

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The findings also demonstrated the strategic use of emotional and ideological meanings in cosmetic advertising discourse. In a L'Oréal advertisement containing the slogan "Because You're Worth It," the textual structure appeared grammatically simple yet semantically complex. The slogan operated less as product promotion and more as an ideological statement associated with self-confidence, femininity, empowerment, and luxury. The accompanying visual elements, including gold color schemes, elegant typography, and confident facial expressions, reinforced these symbolic meanings. According to Safavi's concept of the aesthetic function of language, the slogan exceeded informational communication and operated as an emotionally persuasive sign capable of constructing social identity and aspiration.

In several advertisements, visual symbolism played a dominant role in shaping audience interpretation. A Spotify campaign carrying the slogan "Listen Like You Used To" incorporated nostalgic imagery such as cassette tapes, retro headphones, and faded color palettes. Linguistically, the slogan referred to listening habits; however, visually it activated collective cultural memory associated with earlier musical experiences and emotional nostalgia. The analysis indicated that the advertisement depended on cultural context and audience familiarity with historical media technologies in order to produce its intended meaning. This finding further supports Safavi's argument that meaning production relies on shared cultural codes and contextual interpretation.

The study also identified humor as a recurring persuasive strategy in advertising posters. A Pepsi Max advertisement displaying the slogan "Zero Never Tasted So Good" used semantic contradiction to attract audience attention. The term "zero" commonly suggests absence or emptiness, yet within the advertisement it became associated with pleasure, flavor, and satisfaction. The visual imagery of cold beverage textures, ice effects, and dark contrasting colors reinforced the paradoxical structure of the slogan. The analysis demonstrated that semantic deviation and contradiction increased audience engagement by encouraging interpretive participation and cognitive processing.

Across the analyzed corpus, four dominant patterns emerged. First, lexical ambiguity was repeatedly used to create dual meanings and increase memorability. Second, visual symbols functioned as interpretive extensions of linguistic structures rather than simple illustrations. Third, emotional and ideological associations were central to persuasive communication. Finally, multimodal interaction between text and image generated hidden meanings that required active audience interpretation.

The findings confirm Safavi's theoretical claim that discourse contains multiple semantic layers shaped through signs, context, and cultural interpretation. Advertising posters therefore operate as complex multimodal texts in which linguistic creativity and visual symbolism collaboratively construct persuasive meanings. Wordplay in contemporary advertising discourse functions not only as entertainment or stylistic decoration but also as a strategic communicative mechanism designed to influence interpretation, emotional engagement, and consumer perception.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study demonstrate that contemporary advertising posters rely extensively on the integration of linguistic creativity and visual symbolism to construct persuasive and multilayered meanings. The analysis revealed that wordplay functions as a complex communicative strategy rather than merely a decorative linguistic technique. Through ambiguity, metaphor, semantic deviation, and symbolic representation, advertising discourse encourages audiences to participate actively in the interpretation of commercial messages. This interpretive participation increases cognitive engagement, emotional attachment, and brand memorability, thereby enhancing the persuasive effectiveness of advertisements.

The results strongly support the semiotic and linguistic theories proposed by Koorosh Safavi, particularly his concept of multilayered meaning. Safavi argues that discourse contains simultaneous semantic layers in which literal meanings coexist with implied, symbolic, emotional, and ideological meanings. The analyzed advertisements clearly reflected this theoretical perspective. In the McDonald's slogan "Open All Night," for example, the phrase operated not only as factual information regarding operating hours but also as a symbolic representation of urban lifestyle and social activity. Similarly, Nike's "Run the World" employed semantic polysemy to connect physical movement with concepts of power, ambition, and dominance. These findings indicate that advertising language frequently transcends direct communication and functions through implicit cultural and emotional associations.

The study also confirms Safavi's argument that meaning production depends heavily on contextual and cultural interpretation. In several analyzed posters, linguistic expressions alone were insufficient for complete meaning construction. Instead, audiences were required to interpret slogans through their interaction with images, symbols, colors, and cultural references. The Spotify advertisement "Listen Like You Used To," for instance, relied on nostalgic visual imagery to activate cultural memory associated with earlier forms of music consumption. Without the visual context, the slogan would lose much of its emotional and symbolic significance. This demonstrates that advertising discourse functions as a multimodal communicative system in which textual and visual signs operate interdependently.

Another important finding concerns the aesthetic function of language in advertising communication. Safavi emphasizes that language possesses artistic and persuasive capacities beyond informational communication, and the present analysis strongly supports this claim. The advertisements consistently employed stylistic devices such as puns, metaphor, irony, semantic contradiction, and lexical ambiguity to attract audience attention and stimulate interpretive engagement. In the Pepsi slogan "Zero Never Tasted So Good," the paradoxical use of the term "zero" generated humor and cognitive surprise, thereby increasing audience memorability. Similarly, the KitKat slogan "Break Time" transformed an ordinary expression into a symbolic invitation associated with psychological relaxation and temporary escape from social pressure. These examples illustrate how linguistic creativity contributes directly to persuasive communication in contemporary advertising discourse.

The findings further demonstrate that visual signs play a critical role in strengthening linguistic ambiguity and hidden meaning construction. Images, typography, color schemes, and spatial organization did not function merely as supplementary decorative elements but actively participated in meaning production. The interaction between verbal and visual signs created what contemporary multimodal discourse theorists describe as integrated semiotic systems. In the analyzed posters, visual elements frequently expanded, reinforced, or redirected the meaning of slogans. This confirms that meaning in advertising discourse emerges through the coordinated interaction of multiple semiotic resources rather than isolated linguistic structures.

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A particularly significant aspect of the findings is the role of audience participation in decoding advertising messages. The analyzed advertisements required viewers to interpret hidden meanings, recognize symbolic references, and connect visual and textual elements cognitively. This interpretive process transforms audiences from passive consumers into active participants in meaning construction. Such findings align with contemporary perspectives in semiotics and discourse analysis, which emphasize that communication is not a one-directional transmission of information but a negotiated interpretive process shaped by culture, ideology, and context.

The study also reveals the increasing sophistication of contemporary advertising discourse in digital media environments. Modern advertisements tend to favor short slogans, visual minimalism, symbolic imagery, and indirect communication rather than lengthy descriptive messages. This shift reflects broader developments in digital culture, where audience attention spans are increasingly limited and advertisers compete intensely for immediate cognitive and emotional impact. Wordplay therefore functions as an efficient communicative strategy capable of delivering multiple meanings within minimal textual space. The findings suggest that linguistic ambiguity and visual symbolism have become essential persuasive tools within modern commercial communication.

Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that advertising posters frequently construct ideological meanings related to identity, aspiration, lifestyle, and social values. In cosmetic and luxury advertisements, slogans often promoted concepts of self-confidence, empowerment, exclusivity, and personal success rather than the practical qualities of products themselves. Such findings indicate that advertising discourse increasingly sells symbolic experiences and emotional identities rather than material commodities alone. From Safavi's semiotic perspective, these ideological meanings emerge through multilayered signification in which language and imagery collaboratively shape cultural perception.

Although the study provides important insights into the relationship between wordplay and semiotic communication in advertising posters, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The research focused primarily on English-language commercial advertisements produced by internationally recognized brands, which may limit the cultural diversity of linguistic interpretation. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study emphasizes interpretive depth rather than statistical generalization. Future research may therefore expand the analytical corpus to include multilingual advertisements, cross-cultural comparisons, or audience reception studies examining how viewers interpret advertising wordplay across different social contexts.

Overall, the findings of the study confirm that wordplay in advertising posters functions as a sophisticated multimodal communicative strategy through which advertisers construct persuasive, emotional, and symbolic meanings. By integrating linguistic ambiguity with visual semiotics, contemporary advertisements encourage audience participation, strengthen memorability, and create multilayered interpretive experiences. The study therefore contributes to contemporary research in semiotics, discourse analysis, advertising linguistics, and multimodal communication by demonstrating the central role of hidden meanings in modern advertising discourse.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the linguistic and semiotic dimensions of wordplay in contemporary advertising posters through a qualitative content analysis of selected commercial advertisements published between 2021 and 2025. By analyzing the interaction between verbal ambiguity and visual symbolism, the study demonstrated that advertising discourse operates as a complex multimodal communicative system in which language and imagery collaboratively construct persuasive meanings. The findings revealed that wordplay functions not merely as a stylistic or humorous linguistic device but as a strategic persuasive mechanism designed to attract audience attention, stimulate cognitive engagement, and strengthen brand memorability.

The analysis showed that contemporary advertising posters frequently employ puns, metaphor, semantic deviation, irony, and lexical ambiguity to create multilayered meanings that extend beyond literal interpretation. These linguistic structures become more persuasive when combined with visual signs such as color, typography, symbolic imagery, and spatial organization. The study confirmed that meaning in advertising discourse is generated through the interaction of textual and visual elements rather than through isolated linguistic expression. Audiences therefore participate actively in decoding hidden meanings, cultural references, and symbolic associations embedded within advertisements.

The theoretical framework of Koorosh Safavi proved particularly valuable for interpreting the multilayered semantic structures identified throughout the analyzed corpus. Safavi's perspectives concerning contextual interpretation, symbolic meaning, and the aesthetic function of language provided an effective framework for understanding how advertising discourse produces emotional, ideological, and cultural meanings simultaneously. The findings strongly supported Safavi's argument that meaning is not fixed within linguistic forms but emerges through semiotic interaction, cultural codes, and audience interpretation.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the growing importance of multimodal communication in contemporary digital advertising environments. Modern advertisements increasingly rely on short slogans, indirect communication, visual minimalism, and symbolic representation in order to compete for audience attention within highly saturated media spaces. In this context, wordplay has become an effective communicative strategy capable of delivering multiple meanings within limited textual space while maintaining emotional and aesthetic appeal.

The study contributes to the fields of semiotics, advertising linguistics, discourse analysis, and multimodal communication by demonstrating how linguistic ambiguity and visual symbolism operate together as persuasive mechanisms in advertising posters. It also expands contemporary research on advertising discourse by emphasizing the importance of hidden meanings and audience interpretation in commercial communication. Despite its contributions, the study remains limited to a relatively small corpus of English-language advertisements and qualitative interpretation. Future research may therefore investigate multilingual advertising discourse, cross-cultural audience responses, or the role of artificial intelligence and digital personalization in the production of advertising wordplay.

In conclusion, the study confirms that contemporary advertising posters function as sophisticated semiotic texts in which linguistic creativity and visual representation collaboratively shape persuasive communication. Through multilayered meaning construction, advertisements transform ordinary commercial messages into symbolic, emotional, and culturally significant communicative experiences.

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