

A Semiotic Analysis of Billboard Advertisements in BSD, South Tangerang

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Abstract

This study explores the hidden meanings embedded in billboard advertisements in BSD, South Tangerang, through a semiotic analysis using Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of signs—icon, index, and symbol. By examining both visual elements (such as images and logos) and textual components (such as slogans and brand names), the study reveals how these advertisements are designed to attract upper-middle-class consumers. The findings indicate that billboards for apartments, schools, and residential clusters portray an image of a wealthy, elite, modern, and exclusive lifestyle. These advertisements not only promote products but also reflect the socio-cultural values of the BSD community. By building trust through recognizable brands and persuasive messaging, the advertisements successfully connect with their target audience and influence consumer perception.

Keywords: Semiotics, Billboard Advertisements, Icon, Index, Symbol

A. Introduction

Every message requires a medium for effective delivery (Euchner, 2016), and in the realm of commerce, advertising serves as a powerful communication tool. Advertisements function as persuasive instruments that bridge producers and consumers, promoting products and services while simultaneously shaping consumer perceptions. According to Rehman et al. (2019), advertising not only informs the public about available goods but also influences purchasing behavior by capturing attention, arousing interest, and reinforcing product awareness across diverse platforms—including television, social media, newspapers, and billboards.

Among these platforms, billboards stand out as one of the most enduring and visible advertising media. Beyond their primary function as marketing tools, billboard advertisements offer a rich site for cultural, social, and psychological interpretation. They

often embed deeper meanings through strategic combinations of visual design, colors, images, typography, and persuasive language. These semiotic elements are deliberately constructed to evoke emotional reactions, shape desires, and align products with consumer identities.

In rapidly growing urban areas like South Tangerang, where modern lifestyles and traditional values converge, billboard advertisements reflect more than just commercial messages—they serve as mirrors of society, capturing socio-cultural shifts and public aspirations. Thus, this study seeks to examine the visual and textual representations found in billboard advertisements in South Tangerang, aiming to uncover how these representations function not only to market products but also to communicate underlying cultural narratives. By analyzing these advertisements through the lens of semiotics, this study aims to identify the symbolic strategies advertisers use to influence consumers and communicate meaning.

Semiotics, as the study of signs, offers a comprehensive framework for this kind of analysis. As Chandler (2007) explains, semiotics encompasses all elements that can signify meaning—not just language, but also images, gestures, sounds, and material objects. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1931) both contributed foundational theories to this field. Saussure introduced the concept of the sign as composed of the *signifier* (form) and the *signified* (concept), while Peirce proposed a triadic model consisting of the *representamen* (the form of the sign), the *object* (what it refers to), and the *interpretant* (the meaning derived by the observer). Peirce's model further categorizes signs into *icons* (based on resemblance), *indexes* (based on causal or physical connection), and *symbols* (based on cultural convention).

Numerous studies have applied semiotics to analyze advertisements and logos. For instance, Prasojowati et al. (2019) examined the visual imagery in cigarette product packaging, revealing that despite clear symbolic messaging, consumers often overlook health warnings. Similarly, Putu et al. (2021) analyzed Mentos advertisements using Barthes' (1972) theory of myth, finding that both verbal and non-verbal elements reinforce ideals of social harmony and happiness. Other studies, such as those by Basit et al. (2024) and Aggasi & Rizal (2024), used Peirce's model to explore the symbolic meanings behind corporate and institutional logos, revealing how signs can convey cultural identity, technological progress, and regional values.

Drawing from these theoretical and empirical foundations, this study explores how billboard advertisements in South Tangerang function as semiotic texts. It aims to identify and interpret the signs within these advertisements, examining how visual and textual elements are crafted to influence consumer perception and reflect broader social and cultural dynamics. Ultimately, this research seeks to understand not only the persuasive

techniques of billboard advertising but also the ways in which these public texts communicate identity, ideology, and meaning in an urban Indonesian context.

B. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to investigate the implied and hidden meanings conveyed through billboard advertisements in BSD, South Tangerang. The descriptive qualitative approach is appropriate for interpreting and analyzing signs and symbols in visual media, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of phenomena through observation, description, and interpretation. As Creswell (2009) explains, descriptive qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing data to interpret patterns, meanings, and structures present in a phenomenon, offering detailed insights rather than quantifiable results.

The primary data of this study consist of visual and textual elements found in billboard advertisements located in the BSD area of South Tangerang. These elements include images, colors, typography, layout, slogans, and placement within the urban landscape. The writers used non-participant observation and documentary methods to gather the data systematically.

The data collection process was conducted in the following steps: First, the researchers conducted field observations to locate billboard advertisements in strategic areas around BSD. These locations were selected based on visibility, traffic density, and relevance to public engagement. Second, upon identifying suitable billboards, the researchers photographed each advertisement to capture both its visual content and contextual surroundings. These photographs served as primary documentation for further analysis. Third, after documentation, the researchers examined each billboard for key semiotic components. Particular attention was given to imagery, color schemes, font styles, text messages, logos, and symbolic or cultural references present in the advertisements.

In line with the qualitative nature of the study, the research documentation method—as noted by Putra & Putra (2024)—played a critical role in collecting comprehensive visual data. This included gathering billboard images from multiple locations, printed promotional materials, and relevant media content that contributed to understanding the communicative aspects of billboard advertisements.

The collected data were analyzed using Charles Sanders Peirce's (1931) triadic model of semiotics, which includes three interrelated components: Representamen, Object, and Interpretant (as cited in Chandler, 2007). This model offers a systematic approach to interpreting signs in the following manner:

- 1) Representamen refers to the sign's physical form (e.g., image, text, color) that is perceived by the viewer.
- 2) Object is the actual concept, product, or idea that the representamen refers to.
- 3) Interpretant is the meaning or understanding generated in the mind of the viewer upon seeing the sign.

Each billboard was analyzed by identifying these three elements to determine how visual and textual components communicate both explicit and implicit messages. The analysis aimed not only to uncover persuasive strategies but also to explore how these advertisements reflect broader cultural, social, and consumer-related values.

Through this analytical process, the study seeks to decode the communicative functions of billboard advertisements and explore how their semiotic elements influence viewers' perceptions and behaviors within the local context of South Tangerang.

C. Findings and Discussion



Figure 1. Billboard Advertisement on BSD

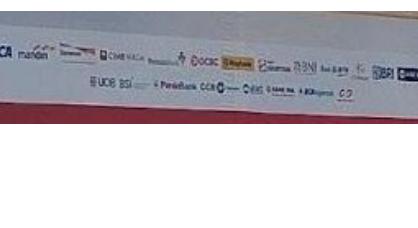
Source: Personal Document (2024)

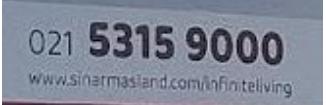
In Figure 1 this billboard is advertising the “Infinite Living” program, a program under Sinarmas Land. This program is an exclusive national program designed to provide convenience and relief in the property ownership process. This program offers a variety of residential options that suit the needs and lifestyle, both for residence and investment. Sinarmas Land is a reputable developer in Indonesia known for its quality and innovative projects.

Table 1 Icon, Index, Symbol

NO	Representament	Description	Object	Interpretation
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1		<p>Social Media icons (account). Like Facebook, Twitter, website, etc.</p>	Icon	Social media account of the company's advertisement.
			Index	All information related to the advertisement, for further information about the advertisement, can be seen on social media.
			Symbol	A symbol of modern communication tools, to connect people through platforms
2		<p>Text: "Infinite Living" The main text placed at the top of the billboards,</p>	Icon	The text of "Infinite Living" with the word 'g' uses an infinite symbol.
			index	The text shows a concept of sustainable, comfortable, and modern living.
			Symbol	Representing the idea of a high-quality lifestyle, which is desirable to many people.
3		<p>Promotional text emphasizing saving money, to grab people's attention</p>	Icon	The text "Savings" is written in bold, "up to" is written in small font, and "20% + 2%" is written in red, bold font.
			Index	The text indicates a direct benefit of purchasing the apartment. Encouraging people to buy immediately due to the potential savings.
			Symbol	A symbol of sales promotion of property or apartment purchases.
4		A big reward or prize for people	Icon	The text "Grand Prize" is written in red and bold font, and "1 Unit Apartment

				Southgate Altuera" is written in bold font.
			Index	An index suggesting exclusivity and high value attracts attention through the appeal of winning a major prize.
			Symbol	Symbolize the high quality of the advertisement.
5		Properties offered for sale.	Icon	Pictures of modern apartments and surrounding facilities, including green spaces and buildings.
			Index	Show the glorious look of the property/apartment to people who see the billboard
			Symbol	symbolizing comfort, modernity, and high-standard living, appealing to potential buyers.
6		Logos of Sponsorship or media partner of the advertisement's company	Icon	A logo of brands such as BCA, Mandiri, BNI etc.
			Index	The advertisement has several brands that support their billboard's advertisement.
			symbol	The displayed logos are signs that have already made agreements with the advertisement's company.
7		The advertisement's company logo	Icon	The advertisement's company "Sinar Mas Land". Placed at the bottom-right corner of the billboard.
			Index	The sign shows the identity of the promoting company.
			Symbol	A symbol of credibility and trustworthiness, associating the

				promotion with a reputable property developer.
8		Website and contact number	Icon	The number “02153159000” is written in bold and “www.sinarmas Island.com/infinite living” the sign information providing the official website and phone number for further information.
			Index	The sign directs buyers to take action by reaching out for more details about the advertisement.
			Symbol	Symbolizing the advertisement simplifies and makes it easier to connect with potential customers.

The advertisement uses social media icons, promotional text, and symbols to connect with its audience. For example, the phrase "Infinite Living," stylized with the infinity symbol, suggests sustainability and a high-quality lifestyle. The text on savings and a grand prize attracts attention through immediate benefits and exclusivity, appealing to potential buyers with promises of modern, comfortable living. Images of apartments and logos of reputable sponsors like banks enhance credibility, positioning the property as a luxurious choice. The inclusion of a company logo, website, and contact information simplifies customer engagement and reinforces trust in the brand. This multi-faceted approach integrates modernity, financial incentives, and trust to appeal to a target audience interested in high-standard living.

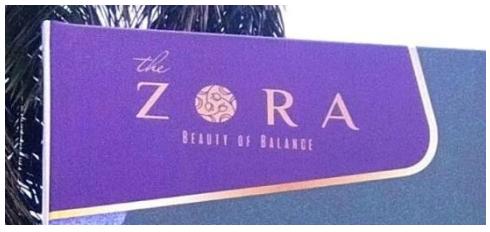


Figure 2. Billboard Advertisement on BSD

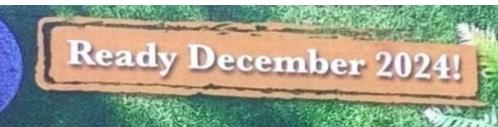
Source: Personal Document (2024)

In Figure 2 shows “The Zora” as the residential billboard advertisement that is located in BSD. The Zora is an exclusive residence that offers a modern concept with a touch of Japanese design, presenting a comfortable and elegant atmosphere. It is designed to fulfill the needs of a premium lifestyle, with a beautiful environment and complete facilities for the comfort of its residents.

Table 2 Icon, Index, Symbol Relation

No	Represetament	Description	Object	Interpretation
1.		The logo of The Zora	Icon	The name of the developer cluster in BSD City
			Index	The ornament circle in the center of the letters Z and R mimics the shape of several flower stalks coming together visually standing for balance and symmetry, which directly relates to the tagline “Beauty of Balance”

			Symbol	The text “Beauty of Balance” is symbolic harmony which the developer wants to convey.
2.		The name Kanade	Icon	The name of a type of cluster developed by The Zora.
			Symbol	The use of golden color in the words “Kanade” and “Luxury in Harmony” shows that Kanade is a type of cluster with luxurious nuances. Also symbolizes the brand’s identity, promoting elegance and balance as part of the Zora product.
3.		The available units	Icon	The text “The Grandest Unit Left” is written with an ending exclamation mark as the attention.
			Symbol	Text “The grandest unit left!” symbolizes the available type of Kanade house is just the bigger one and the term “Grandest” represents a high level of luxury, prestige, and exclusivity.
4.			Icon	The promotional text emphasizes experiencing the luxury cluster with an extra garden in 118m ²

		The promotional text	Index	The size “118m ² ” serves as the spaciousness of the unit.
5.		The available date of the unit	Icon	The text “Ready December 2024” is written with an ending exclamation mark as the attention.
			Symbol	The text symbolizes the audience must be prepared that the unit will be available in December 2024.
6.		The overview of the unit offer	Icon	The advertisements show a garden with two sofas and one table with green nuances.
			Index	The lush greenery and outdoor furniture indexically link to the promise of an “extra garden.”
			Symbol	The tones of green and natural tones in the advertisements symbolize naturality and peace.
7.		Website, Social Media, and Contact Person Number	Icon	the phone number “0811-9741-088” is written at the end of the advertisement and is followed by the website and social media of The Zora.
			Index	The sign directs buyers to take action by reaching out for more details about the advertisement.

			Symbol	Advertising symbolically simplifies and makes it easier to connect with the potential target customer.
8.		The developer company's advertisement logo.	Icon	Several developers associated with The Zora such as BSD Diamond Development, TREI, Mitsubishi Corporation, and Sinarmas land
			Index	BSD Diamond Development refers to the BSD city area, hinting at the project's location. Mitsubishi Corporation as a subsidiary highlights a global partnership. Sinarmas Land is known as a well-known Indonesian property developer.
			Symbol	Symbolizing trustworthiness, associating the promotion with a reputable property developer.

BSD or *Bumi Serpong Damai* known as a residential area located in South Tangerang. As one of the largest integrated areas in Indonesia, BSD includes various types of properties, one of the types is housing (BSD City, 2024). To promote these residential properties, many developers place advertisements to achieve their desired target. One of the marketing media that can be done by installing billboards. As analyzed by the writer, the billboard advertisements employ iconic images to depict the luxury lifestyle related to the property advertisement. It uses symbolic text and logos to evoke a sense of prestige and trust, while also including specific details that connect viewers with tangible aspects

of the offering, such as size and completion date. This multi-faceted approach aims to attract potential buyers by appealing to their emotions, logic, and needs. Also, the advertisement uses the English language, indicating a modern era, and targeting global or elite buyers or audiences.



Figure 3. Billboard Advertisement on BSD

Source: Personal Document (2024)

Figure 3 represents Sampoerna Academy, an international school. Blue and red colors dominate this billboard. It contains the educational programs offered, ranging from the curriculum, student achievements, and entry price promos. The school starts from preschool to secondary level. There is also a phone number on the billboard that can be contacted for further inquiries. Sampoerna Academy is widely recognized by the public for its international standard, complete, and modern facilities and infrastructure.

Table 3. Icon, Index, Symbol Relation

NO	Representament	Description	Object	Interpretation
			Icon	The name of the school

1		The name of Sampoerna Academy	Symbol	Sampoerna Academy is a multilevel academy established by the Putera Sampoerna Foundation, which is a well-known prestige institution in Indonesia. It can lead to the interpretation that it is a high-level school.
2		The headline that introduces the school's value is "MOST PRESTIGE AND ACCOMPLISHED INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL"	Icon	A multilevel international school that provides top-class education services that have created many achievements.
3		3 children from different school levels wear uniforms	Icon	Sampoerna Academy provides various levels of education, from kindergarten to high school.
4		The school expert in the STEAM field	Icon	The school may have advanced labs, trained teachers, and partnerships with industries. Because STEAM uses creative projects and hands-on learning to help students solve problems and think innovatively.
		School reputation and quality	Icon	The school uses an International curriculum

5.			Symbol	<p>The Cambridge curriculum, which is known as a globally recognized education system shows the school's high academic quality and its prestige.</p> <p>Supporting by the data below "1 of 2 students gets distinction (A* & A)" and "94% Pass Rate IGCSE", will strengthen its quality to build parents's trust</p>
6.		<p>Financial benefits</p>	Icon	<p>The phrases suggest that enrolling at a specific period offers financial benefits, such as discounts and waivers, which make the school more affordable to potential students</p>

Signs and how they are interpreted are very much related to how the sign is made, where they are presented, and who their audience is supposed to be ((Gede Bayu Segara Putra & I Kadek Jayendra Dwi Putra, 2024)), so given this, content analysis would dictate some standard codes to analyze the various signs and their function within the context. BSD or *Bumi Serpong Damai* is a place where the "Sampoerna Academy" billboard is located. BSD as one of the modern planned townships in Indonesia, is often associated with middle-to-upper-class residents. Families in BSD often want international education, for their children to prepare them for a global future. By placing its billboard in BSD, Sampoerna Academy shows that it is a high-quality school for families who want the best for their children. Sampoerna, with their branding "*Most Prestigious and Accomplished International School*", fit in with their financial expectation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the writers examined the meaning of advertisements through the use of icons, indices, and symbols to reveal the hidden messages that creators intend to communicate to their audiences. It can be concluded that billboard advertisements in BSD, South Tangerang—including those for apartments, schools, and residential clusters—utilize visual elements such as images and logos, as well as textual elements like words and phrases, to attract upper-middle-class consumers to their products. These advertisements reflect the society in BSD and portray a wealthy, elite, modern, and exclusive lifestyle, showcasing trusted brands and clear messages to build consumer confidence. As a result, these advertisements effectively promote their products and establish a strong connection with the BSD community.

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