

## Representation of Political Ideology on Indian Channels: A Semiotic Analysis of Independence Advertisement

NILOFAR  
SHAMAILA ANJUM  
MUHAMMAD IJAZ  
MALIK HAQNAWAZ DANISH

### Abstract:

*The purpose of this article is to analyze the subliminal ideology presented to the audience in an ad of Ambuja Cement presented by Indian Channel on Independence Day. The study is conducted through Peirce' triadic and Saussure' Dyadic model. Signification is discussed under the concept of denotation and connotation, idea presented by Roland Barthes. Qualitative research method is used to discern placing images and beliefs of different signs. Firstly, the ad impacts the desire of unity between two entities: Pakistan and India but signification connoted different angle of producers. Use of colour, representation of culture and selection of class are discussed as symbolical and indexical signs. This association creates awareness. This article explores the possible hypnosis of the ad producers to catch the consumer by arousing emotions.*

**Key words:** Semiotic Analysis, Independence Advertisement, Qualitative Method, Saussure and Peirce model, Denotation and connotation

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Human beings, since their inception on this planet are looking for the reasons of their being here. For this purpose, they have

coined different myths, art forms, drawings, sign systems and languages to help them in their pursuit. The study of these laws that govern them in cultures throughout the world comes under the rubric of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs and signs include everything which stands for something else. Every sign represents something other in relation to it. However, the relational meanings within a signifier and signified are not permanent rather they are arbitrary, therefore, what the signs are representing are not the realities but the constructed realities. In every society, realities are constructed through the signs familiar to their users. The members of a community of signs interpret different signs in accordance with their context and representation in their minds and culture. They try to construct meaning through language or signs. In other words they represent themselves through the use of signs or by the construction of realities. We can find construction of realities in paintings, arts, media and ads. Semioticians trace what type of realities are constructed and bring forth how and why these realities are constructed. With the same approach to the study of signs the researcher has analyzed an ad of *Indian Channel presented on Independence Day*, through Saussure's dyadic and Peirce's triadic model of signs.

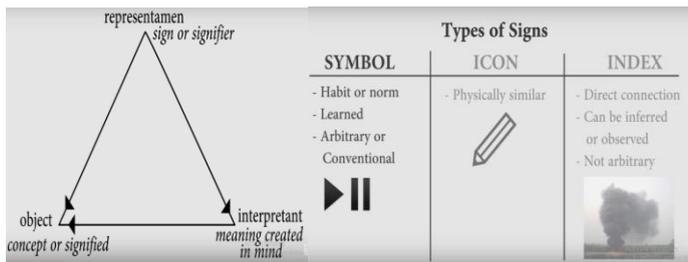
### **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

Semioticians approach a text with different ideological perspectives. Sometimes a model of signs is explained through it and at other, already set model is applied on a text to explore the 'constructed' realities in a text. Purpose of this study is to explore the type of realities constructed through the signs used in ads and how these realities affect the general public's views in the process of opinion making or construction of meanings out of them.



Peirce model of signs is triadic which consists in:

- 1- *Representamen* (form taken by the sign). It is not necessarily material.
- 2- *Interpretant* (sense made of the sign).
- 3- *Object* (something beyond the sign to which it refers). It is not limited only to the physical world but also includes abstract and fictional entities.



In Peircean model, a sign may be Symbolic when does not resemble the signified but totally conventional or arbitrary and relationship between the signifier and signified is agreed upon by the sign users, for example; specific languages, alphabets, punctuation marks, words, phrases and sentences, numbers, traffic lights, flags etc. Similarly, sign may be *Iconic* when it resembles the signified and has some qualities of the referred things; for example a portrait, a cartoon, a scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphor, a dubbed film soundtrack, and imitative gestures. Lastly, according to Pierce, the sign may be *Indexical* when it is directly linked with the signified. This link may be physical or causal, for examples; natural signs (smoke, thunder, footprints, non-synthetic odours and flavours), medical symptoms (pain, pulse-rate), measuring instruments (weathercock, thermometer, clock), 'signals' (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing 'index' finger, a directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot), personal 'trademarks'(handwriting).

In both models, signs are discussed under the terms introduced by Roland Barthes (1900's, impressed by the theory of Saussure) that is

- 1- Denotation (Literary or surface meanings)
- 2- Connotation (Conceptual or implied meanings)

## **2- LITERATURE REVIEW**

To define semiotics is a bit tricky. Semiotics can be anywhere. The shortest definition of semiotics is 'it is the study of signs'. Signs can be drawings, paintings and photographs. Signs also include words, sounds and body language. Though the basic definition of semiotics is 'the study of signs', leading semioticians have variation as to what semiotics involves. Eco (1976) states, 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as sign' (p.7). It is the study of anything that 'stands for' something else.

For semioticians, signs are not to be studied in isolation but as part of a semiotic sign system. They study how meanings are made and how reality is represented. So far as meaning making is concerned the researcher agrees with Saussure (1983) that signs are arbitrary and they are linked in the mind by an associative link. They are part of an abstract system in which things are not primary but it is their relationship which generates meaning. Therefore, meanings are referential and depend on other things in the system. Saussure emphasized in particular negative, oppositional differences between signs. He argued that 'concepts . . . are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system. What characterizes each most exactly is being whatever the others are not' (Saussure 1983, 115).

Saussure (1983), is of the view that language does not reflect the reality but rather constructs it. There is no one-to-one link between the signs and signified. With the help of signs

we can talk about physical as well as abstract world. The signs do not have only single meaning. They can have a number of meanings in them. A sign can refer a number of signifieds and similarly a signified may be referred to by a number of signs. On the basis of Saussurian stance of arbitrariness in the signs the semioticians stressed that the relationship between the signs and the signifieds is conventional. A word means to us what we collectively agree to let it do with us. Thus it can be assumed that signs do not carry the meanings but it is their conventional use with the help of which the meanings are constructed.

But according to Chandler (2007), for Saussure the signifieds are the concepts in the mind only whereas the mental concepts are not the external objects. In contrast to it Peircean model of the sign clearly features the referent which is something beyond the signs. It also features the *interpretant* which refers to an infinite series of the sense made by the signs. In the words of Silverman (1983) quoted by Chandler (2007) the Peircean model gave independence to the signs from any referents.

According to Peirce reality can be found in any event through signs. If we can access to reality only through representation, it is a critical issue. According to Burton (2005), representation is central to understand the production of meaning through texts. Through representation the viewers are derived in the desired direction just as the producers intend to seek out the meaning from the visual texts. The text is intentionally prepared to make out some meaning from it. It is not just a visual but it has an ideological background in its making. Burton has rightly said that 'texts are nothing but a representation in both a material and an ideological sense'. (2005, p.61)

When the reader of a text decodes a text, he produces the meanings preferred by the producer and generates ideas

about the entity. The visual images may create doubts among the viewer about the reality itself, therefore, the way of representation is maintained in such a way that it urges the viewer of a text to construct reality from what is not a real. Burton (2005) is also of the view that representations reflect the ideological positions of the time in which they are created. It is the construction of ideas about a subject. It helps in identifying a social group.

Ads are also one of the means of communication with the target of social groups. The producers of the advertisements use all those signs which are agreed upon in a society and in this way they construct a reality of their own and the same is sought out from their viewers. Ads are the signs that interest me most, since they convey a wide variety of meanings, ideologies, discourses, and "do not simply reflect the world and construct reality" (Hart 1991), but are, 'specific representational practices' (Dyer 1982:115) which society interprets for itself. Semioticians with the analysis of signs can reach the signifieds and understand the motives of their producers in the process of meaning making or the construction of reality represented through the signs.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

Design of this study is content analysis research with qualitative approach as the data in this study is signs that have been interpreted through words. Qualitative research method is appropriate for this type of study because the interpretation of the data is descriptively through the words and commentaries.

#### **3.3. Instrumentation / Data Sources**

Data for this research was analyzed through Saussure's dyadic and Peirce's triadic models of signs. Dyadic consists in two

parts: signifier and signified. Triadic has three parts: *representamen*, *interpretant* and *object*. The detailed description of these parts has been already given in the theoretical framework.

### **3.4 Data Collection Process**

The researcher selected the sample text from YouTube and marked the signs used in it and afterwards, applied the models and interpreted the realities constructed through the marked signs.

## **4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Researcher has selected one of the five best ads of this decade presented by TVC Episode E7S13, Indian Commercial ads on Independence Day. Its total duration is 4 minutes and 33 seconds and it was presented by Ambuja Cement to advertise their product yet no sign of actual product was detected throughout the ad except in the ending slide. Even then name of product was remembered by Audience due to the ideology presented symbolically, that is united Hindustan, still a hidden desire of Hindus They are sponsoring this idea in the coming generation through media, for that advertisement is a very quick and effective source.

This ad is about two neighbours: one is Muslim and second is Hindu. The Muslim elevated the green flag (Pakistan colour) that started a conflict of high and low flag between the two. It goes on, at the end dispute was settled down with exchange of smile, started from the side of Muslim and accepted by the Hindu neighbour. In denotation, it was a misunderstanding between the two but connotation interpreted different aspect of thoughts that were analyzed by the researcher through Semiotic analysis.

Researcher selected 7 modes of analysis according to “Danial Chandler” then discussed by applying the dyadic model by Saussure and triadic model by Peirce. Following are the details of data analysis.

### 1- Colour

Colour is a significant element in all cultures. As Cirlot (2006) stated that “Colour symbolism is one of the most universal of all types of symbolism, and has been consciously used in the liturgy, in heraldry, alchemy, art and literature” (p.6). In this ad, colour significance is copious. Ad starts with “figure no 1(A)” a village presented in two colours houses; blue and skin then in proceeding we observe, in image (B) a character, named Saleem in green Qameez, is standing in a skin and green colour house, with green flag in hands. In image (C) two character are sitting, Mr. Shankar in yellow shirt and one unnamed character in white dress and yellow and skin flying kites are in the background, in “image (D)” an old man is sleeping in traditional colour dress of India, in the home of Shankar.

**Figure 1**



According to Saussure's dyadic and Peirce's triadic model, the images are significant in all the three types of the signs.

**Iconic:** Houses presented in two colours: blue (Representing Hindu Community) and Skin & Green (Representing Muslims Community), it is an iconic representation of two Independent states i.e. Pakistan and India. As well as Saleem and Shankar in green and yellow dress are Iconic representation of their nations.

**Index:** Colour is also indexical sign. It connotes that there are two kinds of people who have separate values but living side by side. One more indexical sign is signified in image (B), when some skin colour area is covering the upper portion of blue colour house that denotes the generosity and good relation of neighbours but actually connoting the interference of Pakistan in the areas of India.

**Symbolic:** Colour has cultural signification in each society and have effect on the audience that how the message is communicated through these colour. Kite of two different colours but relevant to the background colours are symbolic about the norms of two communities. Traditional coloured dress of an old man is a symbol of their elders who have participated in the struggle for the sake of country. A man in white dress in an anonymous personality as this colour is used in both communities but his connotation is ironical. He is playing a role in the conflict between two nations.

Later on, in the whole ad, colour of female's dresses and next day of male dresses connotes to their thoughts and nationalism. Colour of hair signified the age but connotes to the old age of India (Through Shankar) and young age of Pakistan (Through Saleem).

## **2-Dress**

Dress is an indexical sign of culture and class. It signified a number of meanings depending upon the context in which it is

perceived. The entry for the word “dress” in The New Encyclopedia Britannica also gives some space to the functions of dress in cultural context apart from providing “warmth and protection”, which include “to beautify or enhance sexual appeal, and to supply information about the wearer (i.e., age, sex, social status, occupation)” (Encyclopedia Britannica; 2010, vol. 4. pp. 222)

Dress can signify cultural affiliations, ideological associations, psychological or mental inclinations and the class of society to which an individual belongs. “To explore man’s dress therefore is not merely a study in fashion, but it strips him (and her) to their innermost being” (Brasch, 1991). Our dressing connotatively suggests the acceptance or rejection of society norms. Therefore, the dressing of five major characters is very significant. Dress of shalwar, Qameez (Traditional dress of Pakistan) by Saleem and Pant , shirt ( Tradition of European countries) by Shankar connoted the cultural and class differences. Persons or audience in the background are presented in the connotation of class and culture as some are presenting to Hindus and some to Muslims. They are not merely characters, they are icon of their community and nation.

### **3- Expression**

Expressions are indexical sign of thoughts and role which someone is going to play. As it is “faces are index of mind”. Expression of smile and anger in a television ad are not only the images that are static and can be studied as signs but any action or a gesture that constitute a meaning or carries with it some signified concept may also be examined as a sign. In this ad, “figure no 2 (A)” Saleem starts smiling, a signification of reconciliation. In “image (B)” Expression of both Saleem and Shanakar signified to their feelings for each other. In “image (C)” Hindu lady is looking upset that signified her anxious

concern about the issue but Muslim lady is composed. In “image (D)” Saleem is sharing his intention in very aggressive mode.

**Figure 2**



Visual images have two phases: Denotative and connotative. Denotatively we have discussed in above lines. Connotation will be discussed semiotically according to the model of Saussure and Peirce. Expression of smile and anger signified to the inner feelings of character yet connoted to three types of interpretation.

**Symbolic:** As Saleem and his wife are signifying their association with Pakistan, So their attitude is symbolic that shows aggression, initiator in fight but they have to surrender at the end. Smile from Shankar (Indian representation) is less warm as compared to Pakistani representative.

**Iconic:** Angry and worried expressions of females are iconic signification of the public of both nations that connoted to present the softness of Indian Public to the viewers of ads.

**Indexical:** Level of smile exchanged and aggression then response to each other are indexical sign of what is going on between two nations on international or border level but it is represented according to the stake holders of commercial companies because they want to capture their customers. So it

is in their favour to manipulate reality according to their turnover.

One more important character is there without any identity yet his expression “finger” and “angle of eye” are indexical sign of his diplomat role. It connotes to third person who dislikes reconciliation between two states. It also signified that India is innocent and cooperative neighbour yet there are some other forces which stimulate him to react against Pakistan.

#### 4-Time

In “figure no 3(A)”, Shankar is standing in front of a rusted iron grate- symbolically signifying an old house connoting to the long association the Muslims and the Hindus had in the history and yet they are living together from a long time. In “image (B)” both Saleem and Shankar are standing at the time of evening and it is getting dark. This symbolically signifies the change of time.

**Figure 3**



According to triadic model these sign connoted to three types of signification as well.

**Symbolic:** Rust and darkness is symbolic sign of long time passed together, as two nations Muslims and Hindus have spent before such differences. It also connotes to the historical aspects of independence when darkness of misunderstanding

and hardships was faced. Now next day, Sun will enlighten everything and behaviours will be changed.

**Indexical:** Night and day are as indexical sign that refer to the actual misunderstanding and awareness between Hindus and Muslims. Rust is also an indexical sign, connotes that Muslim and Hindus were living together from a long period and even Hindus were so much cooperative that they were giving more than actual rights of Muslims in united India.

**Iconic:** Characters are icons of two nation theory. They are standing apart from each other due to conflict and darkness is declining their true aptitudes from each other.

### **5-Camera angle and focus**

Camera angle illustrates the intentional meanings of every location. Cameraman controls the judgement of his spectators by presenting the truth from his own angle, in fact changes the whole setting for the viewers. In “figure no 4(A)” camera shots of both flags for the first time in which green is very down. In “image (B)” camera shortens the distance though flags are on the same position. In “image (C)” place and resources have equal worth: yet green is low and orange is high, mean same angle. In “image (D)” flags are fixed after reconciliation but again green is down and actual scene of adjusting white colour in center is not visible which was just a shot by camera angle.

According to dyadic model, all these signifiers are signification of action and denotative meanings are competition of up and down position of flags yet all the time we see orange flag is higher than the green one. It connotes to the upper hand position of India on Pakistan in every place, field and time. In all angles there is a big difference of height but it is more surprising when taken out by Saleem and Shankar on same size and force in image (C).

**Figure 4**



According to triadic model, these visual images are:

**Iconic:** In image (A) camera angle is straight and design of the Saleem's house is clear that is iconic representation of mosque or traditional buildings of the Mughal Empire. It connotes to the religious and historical background of Muslims.

**Symbolic:** These angles are symbolic sign of the historical aspect of struggle of two nations. It connotes to the prejudice thought of India that they are on the high ranking in all aspects, fields and times than to Pakistan. Their flag is always high than Pakistan.

**Indexical:** Flag is always a symbol of pride for every nation. As in the image (D) it is joined, an indexical sign that one day two states will reunite after the surrender of Pakistan.

## **6-Setting and location**

Setting refers to the elements used for staging. It aids the audience to think of the elements of the scene like a particular location for the desired shot, characters and their dresses in the same pattern and the direction of movement of the character. These elements give meanings to the scene in a particular

manner and even contribute to the complexity of the meanings. As “figure no 5” has signification of such types of elements: like;

**Figure 5**



**Iconic:** In image (A) we see a praying mat on the wall of skin and green colour house. It is an iconic sign of offering prayers in the Muslim house, a worship offered by only Muslims. So though no body discussed the religion yet signifier declared the signified. In image(C) people in different cultural dresses are standing as iconic signs of their class and multiple communities.

**Indexical:** In image (B,D) Saleem and Shankar shoulder the bamboo and some persons are visible in background, their dressing is an indexical sign of their religion and affiliation with the front man.

**Symbolic:** In the ad, blue colour is symbolized for Hindu community yet on second day, Saleem is in blue colour, signifies his internal association with his neighbours. A third

person in the “image C” is standing surprised and unhappy, symbol of other nations who dislike to see the unity of these two nations.

### 7- Props and food

Props include all those articles of clothes worn by the character in any shot according to setting, role and concept they portray in front of viewers. Props and food fulfill a special function of representation of culture, class and relationship of character with some specific group or a rank or a person. Like in figure no 6, image (A), a man in white dress is wearing black frame spectacles and threads in his right hand. In image(B) Shanakar has Sandoor on his forehead, In Image (C) wife of Shanakar is wearing a long garland in her neck, In image(D) Saleem is wearing an amulet around his neck and in image(E) A man is taking tea in a saucer, again denoted to their class and norms but connote to something as Symbolic/Iconic/Indexical.

**Figure 6**



**Iconic:** Saleem's amulets and Shankar's sandoor are making them iconic of their religious community and same as the wife of Shankar having a long garland is an icon of married woman of Hindus society.

**Symbolic:** Sandoor, amulets , garland and thread in hand are symbolic sign of myths as these articles are associated with special beliefs and tradition transferred from generation to generation, Then become symbolic representation of different cultures and communities follow their own norms and values by living side by side peacefully.

**Indexical:** Wearing black frame spectacles and taking tea in saucer is indexical sign of a middle class. To wear threads in hands is also an indexical sign of xa sect and middle class that signifies to the beliefs and myths followed by them.

## **CONCLUSION**

This ad is introduced with the idea of breaking the geographical, cultural and ideological boundaries between Pakistan and India, an issue that mostly companies aim to catch the common man, highest in population in their country. On the other hand, religion and patriotism are always very sensitive issues for human beings, therefore commercial companies use this ideology especially on Independence Day when people are already in the trance of patriotism. Reconciliation in the ad does not mean the desire of unity; In fact these companies clasp the customer who is the basic agent to increase their sale.

Context of the advertisement presented through the arrangement of signs. Ads appear on the television repeatedly and through a constant bombardment of images on the minds of the viewers, change the mind in normal and natural way. Some

figures probably mean nothing for you but its human nature to extract meanings. Figures of language have no meanings but their arrangements in particular order have a lot of meanings.

Media is transforming communication, entertainment and opinion making through semiotics. It always gives suggestive message of communication. When you see something directly or periphery, each time your retina catches the tiny details. Whenever any ad or drama is introduced, stake holder takes care about the design of work for competition. Ad depends upon the audience and their cultural understanding. In such ads as analyzed in this paper, a message is created to stimulate the feelings of reuniting Pakistan with India. It is designed in political aspect. It is realized to audience that they are watching culture, class and families, belong to their own society and thus, their association with the family is developed.

This association is quite significant in determining the message that is constructed for the audience. Though the mode of address is not direct yet semiotic signification explores the true picture because each sign connotes to some signifier (concept). Signs are social, physical, facial and traditional codes that refer to something else. Each sign connotes different meaning in different arrangement same are the visual images represent different aspects of life.

Semiotic is a vast field and discipline that have anthropological and sociological dimensions. It is related to every branch and walk of life either to apply through dyadic (Sign/Syntax, Signal/Semantic) or by triadic (Representant, interpretant, object). It classifies sign or sign system in relation to the way they are communicated. Its analysis is used to interpret the meanings and how these meanings are created. Analyses may be definitional (Researcher's interpretation), Personal (creator's interpretation) or contextual (perceived from context) but in every analysis, signs are always there to signify the image.

In marketing, semiotics is used to capture the mind of the customer by using different modes as mentioned by Chandler and discussed in this paper. Semiotics ascribe signification not only to paper, print or social media but it is existing in everything that has a sign. It is taught as a subject in the discipline of mass-communication and MBA in the above mentioned ad presented country, therefore use of sign and symbol is bounteous in their media. They believe that semiotic elements connote to the brands development factors and they recommend considering the possible connotation that would arise through the communication message before launching any advertisement.

## REFERENCES

1. *Happy Independence Day 5 Best Indian Commercial Ads This Decade | TVC Episode E7S13* [Video file]. (2017, August 15). Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_SJPP84CLSc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SJPP84CLSc)
2. Brasch, R. (1991). *The book of the year: Special days and their meanings*. Toronto: Key Porter Books.
3. Burton, C. R. (1947). *Semiotic foundations of two concepts of probability*.
4. Chandler, D. (2018). *Semiotics: The basics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
5. Cirlot, J. E., & Sage, J. (1971). *A dictionary of symbols*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
6. Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
7. Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc. (2010). *The new Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

8. Sanders, C. (2006). *The Cambridge companion to Saussure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. *Semiotics and How it's Used in Advertising* [Video file]. (2016, December 16). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo7V48EOqwU>
10. *Semiotics: Making Meaning from Signs, Symbols, Icons, Index | LittleArtTalks* [Video file]. (2015, August 13). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGYOHKCigAo>
11. *A theory of semiotics*. (1979). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.