

Semiotic Analysis of Signs and Symbols in Digital Instant Noodle Advertisements: A Marcel Danesi Approach

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.10040045>

Received: 19 March 2025; Revised: 01 April 2025; Accepted: 05 April 2025; Published: 08 May 2025

ABSTRACT

The popularity of Korea in the field of digital advertising in Indonesia is the result of a synergy between the Hallyu phenomenon, the implementation of innovative digital marketing strategies, and the strong interest of the Indonesian public in Korean products and culture. This study aims to understand how visual and verbal elements function to convey messages, create emotional appeal, and build a product image that is relevant to Korean popular culture through instant noodle advertisements on digital media starring Korean artists, Choi Siwon and NewJeans. The method used is descriptive-qualitative analysis based on Marcel Danesi's semiotic theory, which classifies signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. The data analyzed includes visual elements (color, images, model poses) and verbal elements (text on packaging, slogans, Hangul writing) found in the advertisements. The results show that icons, indexes, and symbols in these advertisements effectively represent the taste, quality, and cultural values of the product. The packaging images, chili peppers, red color, and cheerful expressions of the models visually depict enjoyment, spiciness, and emotional appeal that connect the product with a young audience through pop culture elements (icons and indexes), while the use of Hangul text and the presence of Korean artists as models reflect the authenticity of Korean culture (symbols). These elements are designed to attract consumers, especially fans of Korean culture, and to create the impression of a premium and modern product

Keywords: Korean Culture Instant Noodle Advertisements Signs and Symbols Visual and Verbal Marcel Danesi

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has brought significant changes in various aspects of human life, including communication and marketing methods. One major change is the emergence of digital advertising as a primary marketing strategy. Danesi (2019) revealed that advertisements use both verbal and non-verbal techniques to make their messages as persuasive as possible, serving as a signifier of the modern world designed to influence attitudes and lifestyle behaviors, while unconsciously suggesting how we can fulfill our deepest impulses and aspirations through consumption. Digital advertisements, which include various forms such as social media ads, paid searches, and sponsored content, have shifted the marketing communication paradigm from traditional models to more interactive, personalized, and real-time models (Somadi et al., 2022; Suma et al., 2024; Andini et al., 2022). This transformation is not just about the medium, but also about the way messages are delivered and received. In digital advertisements, signs and symbols play a crucial role. Signs can be visual elements such as logos, colors, and typography, while symbols encompass meanings generated from cultural, social, or psychological associations inherent in those signs.

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, is a key foundation for understanding how digital advertisements are designed to capture attention, evoke emotions, and build relationships with the audience. Semiotics is an academic discipline that studies signs, whether words, symbols, or other representations used by humans to think, communicate, reflect, transmit, and preserve knowledge (Chandler, 2007; Danesi, 2019; Salsabila et

al., 2025). Terminologically, semiotics can be defined as the study of various objects, events, and all cultures as signs. Essentially, semiotic analysis is an effort to sense something unfamiliar or something that needs to be questioned when reading a text/discourse or observing a particular object and trying to find the hidden meaning behind a discourse (Barthes, 1991; Fairuz, 2022; Jariah et al., 2022; Muchtar et al., 2023).

In the context of modern communication, the audience is not just a passive recipient of messages but also actively responds, recreates meanings, or even redistributes the messages within their social networks. Therefore, a deep understanding of how signs and symbols function in digital advertisements is key to creating effective and meaningful communication. The signs and symbols used in digital advertisements must be able to reach various audience segments with diverse cultural, linguistic, and preference backgrounds.

The phenomenon of Korean popular culture (K-Pop, K-Drama, K-Food) has also influenced the way digital advertisements are constructed. Visual and verbal elements in ads often adopt aspects of Korean popular culture to attract attention, particularly among young consumers who idolize this culture (Ko et al., 2025; Youngsun et al., 2024; Kyeongjae et al., 2025; Sachiya et al., 2025). The role of Korean popular culture in digital advertisements is a key focus in this research. Advertisements that leverage these elements often use symbols and signs familiar to the audience, such as characters or lifestyles in Korean dramas, to create an emotional bond with the product being advertised. Using Danesi's semiotic theory, this research will explore how visual and verbal elements in advertisements function to convey messages, create emotional appeal, and build a product image relevant to Korean popular culture.

Research on Korean-themed advertisements has been conducted, such as by Riris et al., (2022), in their research entitled *Representasi Imperialisme Budaya Korea Dalam Iklan Mie Sedaap K-Spicy Series "I Challenge You"*. This study aimed to describe the denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings found in the Mie Sedaap K-Spicy series advertisement and to understand the form of the show that represents cultural imperialism in the advertisement. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis strategy, the findings showed that Mie Sedaap tried to invite Korean enthusiasts through its commercial star, a well-known figure in the K-pop world (Korean pop), to experience the enjoyment of Korean-flavored noodles, which were acknowledged by real Koreans like Siwon Choi, the commercial star of the Mie Sedaap K-Spicy series advertisement.

A second study by Triana and Wahyu in (2019), titled *Analisis Semiotik Terhadap Iklan Youtube Mie Sedaap Korean Spicy Chicken*, analyzed the semiotic representation of the Mie Sedaap Korean Spicy Chicken advertisement on Mie Sedaap's YouTube channel. Based on Peirce's (1955) and Van Leeuwen's (2005) semiotic analysis theories, the results showed that the icon of this advertisement was Choi Siwon, a person from Korea, indicating the authenticity of the Korean Spicy Chicken flavor. The index of the advertisement was the Mie Sedaap packaging with a black color and red flames, indicating spiciness, and Choi Siwon's body movement, signifying the authenticity of the spicy flavor. The symbol in the advertisement was the Hangul text, which indicated that Mie Sedaap Korean Spicy Chicken is an Indonesian product with authentic Korean taste.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics and Meaning Construction

Danesi's approach (1946) to semiotics draws heavily from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, but he also develops his own theories on how signs function and how meaning is constructed. In Danesi's framework, semiotics is not just the study of signs but also the study of the processes that underlie the creation and interpretation of meaning. His work emphasizes the role of the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the concept the sign represents) in understanding how communication functions.

Danesi builds on Saussure's dyadic model of the sign, where signs are made up of a "signifier" and a "signified." However, he extends this understanding by incorporating context and cultural codes as key

elements in the semiotic process. For Danesi, a sign can have multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is used, the cultural codes of the interpreter, and the interaction between these elements.

Signs, Codes, and Cultural Context

Danesi is particularly interested in how signs are interpreted through cultural codes, which are systems of rules and conventions that shape the way individuals in a given culture make sense of the world. These codes can vary across different cultures, and as such, interpretation is not universal but mediated by cultural backgrounds and social contexts. Danesi's approach moves away from a purely linguistic interpretation of signs and highlights the importance of social and cultural factors in how we understand signs. For instance, the meaning of a commercial advertisement, a gesture, or even a piece of music is highly contingent upon the cultural background of both the creator and the interpreter. His work often addresses how different cultural and social contexts affect communication, meaning-making, and the interpretation of signs, particularly in the media and mass communication.

Semiotics in Media and Communication

In his work on media and communication, Danesi explores how modern media technologies transform the ways in which we produce and consume signs. He analyzes the relationship between traditional forms of media, such as print and broadcast, and newer media like the internet and social media platforms. Danesi suggests that new media offer new possibilities for signs to be produced and interpreted, particularly through digital signs such as emojis, memes, and gifs. He is particularly interested in how these new digital signs create new forms of communication that are often informal and rely heavily on context for their meaning. This shift is part of a larger trend toward visual communication, where images and symbols play a more prominent role than words. Danesi's work explores how this change is reshaping the field of semiotics and communication theory.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The aim of this study is 1) to identify and analyze errors in understanding and translating Korean idioms or cultural expressions used in Indonesia, and 2) to evaluate the misinterpretation or misunderstanding of Korean language expressions in the context of their use in Indonesia. This includes errors in interpreting idioms or idiomatic expressions that are uncommon or incorrect, which may hinder the process of learning and fully understanding the culture.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to gain a deep understanding of human and social issues, as explained by Walidin & Tabrani (2015). The researcher analyzes how people derive meaning from their surroundings and how these meanings influence behavior. The data in this study is presented descriptively in the form of words or sentences to systematically and accurately describe the subject matter. The data collection method involves visual content analysis, where the researcher examines images, colors, textures, and other visual elements in advertisements. This study focuses on digital media advertisements for instant noodles featuring Korean artist Choi Siwon, using Marcel Danesi's semiotic theory as the basis for analysis.

Marcel Danesi, a semiotic expert, explains that signs are essential in communication and can be categorized into icons, indexes, and symbols. An icon resembles the object it represents, such as a picture or diagram, helping create a direct connection with the product. An index has a direct or causal relationship with its object, such as a company logo reflecting brand values. A symbol, however, has an arbitrary relationship with its object and relies on social or cultural conventions, like language or abstract logos, to convey complex meanings. Danesi also distinguishes between denotative and connotative meanings in signs: denotative meaning is the direct, literal meaning of a sign, such as an apple representing the fruit itself, while connotative meaning is shaped by cultural and social contexts, where an apple might symbolize health or education. In digital advertising, these signs and meanings evolve with popular culture, helping brands

connect emotionally with audiences. As media continues to influence cultural perceptions, Danesi (2019) highlights the importance of understanding these meanings to be more aware of their effects on society.

RESULTS

Instant noodle advertisements have become one of the most effective forms of marketing communication in reaching various segments of society. With a creative approach and the use of strong visual, verbal, and emotional elements, these advertisements can create a unique appeal for consumers. In addition to serving as a medium for product promotion, instant noodle advertisements often reflect consumption patterns, cultural values, and lifestyle trends of the target market. Therefore, a further analysis of the elements in instant noodle advertisements can provide a deeper understanding of the marketing strategies employed and their impact on consumer perceptions.

Data 1



Identification of Visual and Verbal Signs

Visual Signs:

The dominant red color in the background is strategically used to evoke a sense of enthusiasm, bravery, and spiciness, which perfectly aligns with the product's theme of being "spicy." Red, often associated with energy and excitement, enhances the boldness of the advertisement, attracting attention and stirring curiosity. Complementing the red is the use of black on the packaging, which creates an impression of elegance, modernity, and exclusivity. This combination of colors not only highlights the product's dynamic and bold qualities but also positions it as a premium offering in the market. The layout and shape of the advertisement are thoughtfully designed to emphasize the product as the main focal point. The pose of the model, Siwon, holding the product, draws attention to the packaging, ensuring it takes center stage. The packaging itself is visually appealing, featuring an image of noodles with chili and chicken, which adds to the product's appetizing appeal and suggests the flavorful experience awaiting consumers.

In addition to the visual elements, the model chosen for the advertisement plays a crucial role in capturing consumer interest. Siwon, a well-known male model, is selected not only for his popularity but also for his ability to provide aspirational appeal, making the product more desirable. His image helps establish a connection with the audience, as he represents a sophisticated and trendy lifestyle. The white clothing worn by Siwon contrasts sharply with the red and black tones of the background and packaging, adding a touch of freshness and modernity to the overall design. This contrast not only highlights the professional and contemporary nature of the advertisement but also enhances its visual balance, ensuring the product remains the primary focus while still presenting a polished and stylish image.

Verbal Signs:

The text on the packaging is carefully crafted to reinforce the product's identity and appeal to its target audience. The brand name "Mie Sedaap Instant" prominently featured on the packaging strengthens the

product's identity and makes it easily recognizable to consumers. The phrase "Korean Spicy Chicken" highlights the Korean flavor, which is the main selling point of the product, combining the spiciness with the growing trend of Korean culture. Additionally, the word "Selection" is used to create an impression of a premium or special edition product, subtly suggesting that this is a higher-quality or more exclusive version of the classic Mie Sedaap.

In addition to the primary text, the Hangul text ("짜장" meaning very delicious/tasty/great) featured on the background and packaging serves to further emphasize the authenticity of the Korean flavor. This inclusion of Korean writing connects the product directly to Korean culture, appealing to consumers who are interested in or fans of Korean food and trends. The use of Hangul not only enhances the product's cultural relevance but also reinforces the idea that the flavor experience is genuinely Korean, which can attract consumers seeking an authentic taste of Korea.

Categorization of Signs

No	Aspect of Semiotics	Remarks
1	Icon:	a. The image of noodles and chili directly represents the product content. b. The male model represents a real person who evokes emotional appeal.
2	Index:	c. The red color and chili image indicate spiciness. d. The model's pose with a confident expression signals the superior quality of the product.
3	Symbol:	e. The Hangul text ("짜장") becomes a symbol of Korean cultural authenticity. f. The word "Selection" becomes a symbol of product exclusivity.

Denotative and Connotative Meanings

The denotative meaning of the advertisement is straightforward, with the image of a man holding an instant noodle product that features a spicy Korean theme, clearly showcasing the product itself. However, the connotative meaning goes beyond the surface level, combining both visual and verbal elements to convey that this is not just an ordinary instant noodle, but rather a product that offers an authentic and exclusive Korean cultural experience. The use of a famous male model further enhances the message, giving the ad a modern, professional, and aspirational appeal. This choice influences consumers, as the model's presence adds a sense of social appeal, making the product more desirable and encouraging potential buyers to choose it due to its association with a trendy and desirable lifestyle.

Interpretation of the Function of Signs

The advertisement effectively creates an appetizing appeal with the image of noodles topped with chili and chicken, which immediately grabs attention and sparks hunger and curiosity. The vibrant and mouthwatering visual entices viewers, making the product seem even more desirable. In addition, the advertisement reinforces popular culture by incorporating Korean elements in both the text and concept, tapping into the global K-pop and Korean culture trends. This helps to attract a younger audience who are fans of Korean entertainment and food. The use of colors, design, and words like "Selection" further emphasizes the product's premium quality, positioning it as a high-end, exclusive offering in the market. This combination of visual appeal, cultural relevance, and product excellence makes the advertisement compelling and attractive to consumers.

Role of Popular Culture

The advertisement leverages the popularity of Siwon, a member of the K-pop group Super Junior, as the brand ambassador, capitalizing on his status to attract consumer attention. In pop culture, celebrities like Siwon have become symbols of lifestyle, success, and modern trends, which makes his presence in the ad particularly appealing to fans. By incorporating references to Korean culture, the advertisement taps into the

global Hallyu wave, or Korean Wave, attracting consumers who are interested in Korean cultural trends, including music, food, and lifestyle. The ad also successfully combines both local and global narratives, blending Mie Sedaap's identity as an Indonesian brand with global elements like Korean culture and international figures such as Siwon. This creates a culturally relevant bridge, signaling that the product is not only relevant to Indonesian consumers but also to international audiences inspired by Korean pop culture.

Data 2



Identification of Visual and Verbal Signs

Visual Signs

The advertisement uses bright colors such as red, yellow, blue, and pink to create an impression of cheerfulness, youth, and energy, aligning perfectly with the target market of young consumers. These vibrant colors help convey a sense of excitement and vitality, making the product feel lively and appealing to the demographic it aims to attract. The shape and layout further enhance the ad's cultural relevance and product appeal. The golden pot, a characteristic symbol of Korea, reflects the noodle-eating culture in Korea, providing an added sense of authenticity to the product. Additionally, the Indomie product packaging visually showcases the various product variants, offering clear and direct information about the available choices, which helps consumers easily identify their preferences.

In terms of modeling, the image of K-pop group members, specifically NewJeans, plays a crucial role in attracting attention. As icons representing one of the most famous K-pop groups, their presence in the ad is designed to capture the interest of their vast fan base. This use of popular K-pop figures not only reinforces the ad's connection to Korean culture but also appeals to a global audience that follows these stars. By leveraging the popularity of NewJeans, the advertisement effectively taps into the power of celebrity influence, drawing fans who are eager to associate with the trendy, youthful, and energetic image the group embodies.

Verbal Signs

The text on the packaging plays a crucial role in strengthening the product's identity and establishing its cultural relevance. The brand name "Indomie" is prominently displayed, reinforcing the familiarity and recognition of the product among consumers. The phrase "Korean Ramyeon Series" is strategically used to position the product within a specific category—Korean Ramyeon—thereby creating a strong cultural association with Korean food. This helps consumers immediately understand the nature of the product and its connection to Korean cuisine, which is increasingly popular worldwide. Additionally, the use of Hangul text

(한국라면) further emphasizes the product's Korean identity, reinforcing the authenticity of its flavor and cultural origins. By incorporating the Korean language on the packaging, the product signals its roots in Korean culinary traditions, appealing to consumers who are seeking an authentic Korean dining experience. This cultural reference not only highlights the product's authenticity but also resonates with consumers who are drawn to the growing global interest in Korean culture, particularly through food.

Categorization of Signs

No	Aspect of Semiotics	Remarks
1	Icon:	a. The image of the Indomie Korean Ramyeon Series packaging and noodles served in a bowl. This icon visually represents the actual product. b. The models in this advertisement (members of NewJeans) represent figures that visually attract the target market.
2	Index:	c. The cheerful facial expressions of the models suggest that the product is delicious, enjoyable, and worth trying. d. The use of visual elements such as bright colors, emojis (hearts, music, pointing fingers), and the noodle bowl icon indicates a connection with pop culture and young audiences.
3	Symbol:	e. The Indomie logo and the NewJeans group name serve as symbols of the brand and collaboration that connect consumers to a global identity. f. The phrase "Oh My Good! It's Indomie" is a symbolic play on words to attract attention with an informal style.

Denotative and Connotative Meanings

The denotative meaning of this advertisement is clear and straightforward, as it promotes Indomie's new Korean Ramyeon Series, which is available in various flavors. The packaging and noodle bowls, featuring complete ingredients such as mushrooms, chili, and vegetables, are prominently showcased, highlighting the product's convenience and appeal. This direct representation of the product emphasizes its authenticity and variety, making it easily recognizable to consumers seeking a quick and flavorful meal. On a deeper level, the connotative meaning of the ad taps into current cultural trends and the preferences of younger audiences. The collaboration with the popular K-pop group NewJeans connects the product to the widespread influence of Korean culture, particularly among millennials and Gen Z. The use of bright colors and playful elements, such as emojis, conveys a cheerful, youthful, and energetic vibe, reflecting the lifestyle and attitude of these generations. Additionally, the phrase "Oh My Good! It's Indomie" blends the tone of online communication with enthusiastic expressions, reinforcing the product's image as a modern and trendy choice in the eyes of consumers.

Interpretation of the Function of Signs

No	Function	Remarks
1	Communicative Function (Conveying a Message):	a. This communication function focuses on building an emotional connection and capturing the attention of audiences connected with the global pop culture phenomenon, Hallyu (Korean Wave).
2	Referential Function (Representing the Product):	b. This function directs attention to the product directly, reinforcing associations with the flavor and uniqueness of Korean culture.

The emotional function of the advertisement is designed to trigger consumer desire by tapping into the allure of Korean pop culture, encouraging viewers to try the product while connecting them to a global cultural trend. By leveraging the widespread popularity of Korean culture, particularly K-pop, the ad evokes feelings

of excitement and curiosity, making the product more appealing to consumers who are eager to experience the latest cultural phenomena. On the other hand, the cultural function of the ad highlights the product's role in representing modern global culture. With an Indonesian brand like Indomie incorporating Korean elements, the advertisement positions the product as a bridge between local and international markets, showcasing how an Indonesian brand is embracing Korean culture to appeal to a global audience. This reinforces the product's cultural relevance and broadens its appeal beyond its original market.

Role of Popular Culture

The use of NewJeans, a widely known K-pop group, demonstrates how Korean popular culture, or the Hallyu Wave, has become a global influence, positioning Indomie as a brand that is relevant on an international scale. By featuring such a prominent K-pop group, the advertisement connects the product to the broader global appeal of Korean culture, which resonates with fans worldwide. Additionally, the rise of ramyeon as a key element of Korean cuisine, popularized through Korean dramas and music, further enhances the product's connection to the trendy Korean culinary culture. This association helps to position Indomie's Korean Ramyeon Series as part of the growing global fascination with Korean food, making it an attractive option for consumers looking to experience an authentic taste of Korea.

Digital Communication Style

The advertisements for Mie Sedaap and Indomie Korean Series showcase a strategic adaptation to digital communication patterns through the use of emojis, bright colors, and visual elements typical of social media. These features resonate with a younger audience familiar with internet culture aesthetics, making the advertisements more engaging and relevant. By incorporating symbols of Korean popular culture, both brands effectively attract consumers' attention, communicate product values, and enhance their appeal. Despite having different approaches, both advertisements successfully utilize visual and verbal signs to reinforce their message and create a strong brand identity.

Mie Sedaap's advertisement emphasizes an exclusive and bold image through its dominant red and black color scheme, symbolizing spiciness, energy, and modern elegance. The well-known male model, dressed in white, creates a striking contrast while enhancing the premium feel of the product. The visual elements, such as the appetizing noodles with chili and chicken, directly stimulate the consumer's senses, while verbal elements like "Korean Spicy Chicken" and Hangul text further reinforce authenticity. In contrast, Indomie Korean Series takes a more vibrant and youthful approach by using bright colors such as red, yellow, blue, and pink, reflecting energy and enthusiasm. The visual of a golden Korean-style pot links the product to Korean culinary traditions, while the inclusion of K-pop group NewJeans strengthens its connection with younger consumers and the K-pop fandom.

vertisements use signs and symbols to create distinct brand narratives. Mie Sedaap projects an image of exclusivity and professionalism, appealing to consumers who seek an authentic, premium Korean experience. Meanwhile, Indomie embodies playfulness, modernity, and youthful excitement, leveraging K-pop culture to engage a younger demographic. By incorporating elements of Hallyu, both brands successfully connect with global trends while maintaining their local market appeal. This aligns with Stuart Hall's perspective on social semiotics, which suggests that the meaning of signs is fluid and shaped by cultural contexts. While both brands highlight Korean culture, they do so in ways tailored to their respective target audiences—Mie Sedaap appealing to premium consumers and Indomie catering to young, trend-conscious individuals.

CONCLUSION

The Mie Sedaap and Indomie Korean Series advertisements both leverage visual and verbal elements to capture consumers' attention and connect the products with Korean popular culture. The Mie Sedaap advertisement highlights a sense of exclusivity and professionalism through the use of red and black colors,

Korean-language verbal signs, and the inclusion of famous celebrity Siwon from Super Junior. Its approach emphasizes premium quality and an authentic Korean experience. On the other hand, the Indomie advertisement takes a cheerful, youth-oriented approach with bright colors, a collaboration with the K-pop group NewJeans, and the symbol of a golden Korean-style pot. Its strategy creates a modern, energetic, and playful impression that resonates with youth culture. Both advertisements successfully integrate elements of Hallyu culture to create emotional and cultural relevance, build product appeal, and strengthen their positions in both local and global markets.

In digital media, Danesi's semiotic theory helps explain how meaning is constructed through the interaction of signs within the context of evolving culture and technology. Danesi's semiotic theory is relevant in digital media analysis as it provides a framework for understanding how signs function in modern communication. In a world increasingly influenced by technology and visual culture, the semiotic approach allows us to explore the deeper meanings behind signs and symbols, connecting digital media elements with broader cultural and social dynamics.

Financing

The authors did not receive financing for the development of this research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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