

Empowering Semiotic Codes for Persuasion

Retno Purwani Sari
Departemen Sastra Inggris
Universitas Komputer Indonesia
 Bandung, Indonesia
 retno.purwani.sari@email.unikom.ac.id

Diba Basar
Scientific Publication and Intellectual Property Right Unit
Faculty of Medicine
Universitas Padjadjaran
 Bandung, Indonesia
 artsiyanti@gmail.com

Abstract— This study investigates the semiotic modes of Aladdin poster in persuasive technology application that allows children to experience critical evaluation and enhance children’s morality towards maturity. Moreover, by focusing on the use of semiotic resources to maximize the persuasive effect, Jewitt et al.’s social semiotics are applied to approach to multimodality. Social and cultural construction influence meaning. This study implemented analytic descriptive method to explain the phenomena. The findings highlight meaning is invented using all semiotic modes which initiate children to experience imaginatively a specific journey. Children are motivated to make a certain evaluation, and to judge moral values conveyed in the poster. The obtained results also facilitate adults with a means to promote morals intended and suggest persuasive strategies to communicate information.

Keywords—Persuasive Strategy, Semiotic Modes, Social Semiotics

I. INTRODUCTION

Moral maturity, defined by the ability to adopt to social and moral values, helps children to behave in society. Various resources are required to support moral development in children to be able to achieve this moral maturity. Although storytelling has been suggested as an effective way to communicate values to children [1], a growing persuasive technology has offered other alternative ways to do this by giving children challenge and pleasure to learn and think critically. On the net a movie poster, advertising a story filmed, mostly functions as showcasing all different characters illustrating characterizations of each in the story. Simply, the poster communicates the point of information – whether physical and/or other ‘fictitious’ and symbolic realities – visually.

As suggested by Munoz-Calvo [2], the language in use evolves within this visual communication. Language is defined as structured codes constructed by the combination of semiotic modes [3, 4, 5]. The semiotic modes of the poster are treated as visual means presenting the context that facilitate children with resources for action. Since this context shares a specific cultural sense [5], meanings may be dynamic. The initial social and culture of children determine meaning interpretation.

Along with the growing interest in visual communication, various perspectives have been applied to examine this phenomenon. In this study two perspectives, social semiotics and persuasion, are used to analyze the way in which semiotic codes empower children to achieve and develop their moral maturity. Social semiotics deals with a thorough examination of image in a specific context, and with how the image is interpreted using all available resources of interpretation and inter-textual connections [6]. In this sense, visual resources

perform Halliday’s metafunctions simultaneously to convey meanings [7]. Meanwhile, persuasion completed on how children attach to the images [8].

As supported by Slon [9], image schemata provide pre-conceptual structures capable of creating realities; children may explore their own thoughts, experiencing certain events that encourage them to evaluate the appropriateness of their behavior. This enhances social and moral development in children, reflected as the development of self-esteem [10]. Thus, image as an evolution of language offers the opportunity to interpret the intended meaning. By stimulating emotion and imagination, the image may motivate children to experience a specific journey, adventure as well as fantasy. In this notion, image with a specific context defines affordance as all possible actions [5].

Briefly, the image presents surface and hidden intended meanings both content and context. Modal affordances of the image involve contextual meanings of signs, that is, icons or animated, colors, and positions. Adapting Pierce’s theory, signs are recognized as *representant* (form of signs), *interpretant* (sense made), and *object* (what the sign stands for) [11]. To interpret the dynamic meaning of *interpretant*, conception is built through three modes of relationships within signs – *symbolic* (arbitrary signifier, material form), *iconic* (signifier resembles the signified, concept), and *indexical* (signifier is connected to signified). To sum up, the social semiotic analysis of images covers the connection between signs and their meanings. The process of interpretation leads to the earliest experience of human life. Image provides structure to the experience.

In order to link social semiotic conceptions of the image to persuasion, three assumptions are made: (1) cultural sense shared determines meaning interpretation; (2) image stimulates the imagination; and (3) image may have different effects on children because of its contextual-dependency. By the theory, this study applies Kress and van Leeuwen’s model of visual social semiotics: *representational*, *interactive* and *compositional* [12].

This model describes that all signs structuring images supply comprehensive resources to interpret the intended meaning attributed to the symbolic systems within images. The representational metafunction is concerned with the pattern of presentation in which particular experience is encoded visually [7]. Meanwhile, the pattern of interactions between participants represents interactive metafunction. The latest metafunction, compositional metafunction, deals with the meaning of composition; representation and communicative acts are seen as meaningful text [7].

Supporting Kress and van Leeuwen’s postulate, this study claims that all semiotic modes of images in movie poster ads,

communicate intended meaning visually using representational requirements to function interactively as a whole system. The main concern is to establish how image stimulates children's emotions and imagination in order to be experienced in social and cultural reality, making a judgment on appropriate behavior. Using Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, the intended meanings conveyed symbolically in signs of the image are uncovered. In order to measure experiment design, the analytic descriptive method is implemented within a closed and critical reading technique for collecting data and descriptive technique for analyzing data. Various related theories are adapted to examine the characteristics of signs.

II. METHODS

This section informs the practical approach to the techniques of collecting and analyzing data as well as conceptual orientation outlined. The goal of the study was to investigate denotative and connotative meanings to achieve intended meaning being communicated by the image of the new 'Aladdin' poster and to discover the way in which the images stimulate children's emotion and imagination.

This study considered that the poster facilitates adults to promote social and moral values to children. This persuasive technology within its high-tech interface attracts children's interest in conducting evaluation critically. The literacy movement is performed differently. Current approaches to foster awareness of visual communication have explored various perspectives based on different approaches, producing moderate and acceptable strategies to accomplish social movement in society.

This study explores whether the signs of the image in the new 'Aladdin' poster could represent social and moral values to develop moral maturity in children. Among modal affordances of the poster, the examination focuses on the visual affordance of the new 'Aladdin' poster.

A. Genre of Data Source, Data Indicators, and Hypothesis

This study used a new 'Aladdin' poster to take account of originated values, to the trend of remaking live-action Disney's movie, and to the effective strategy of persuasive technology in investing values. The full trailer debut was published in March 2019. It has been claimed that a unique challenge of remaking live-action goes along with Aladdin [13]. As a result, the new 'Aladdin' poster has participated in accomplishing Disney's target. In other words, the poster was designed persuasively. The persuasive strategy was acknowledged.



Fig. 1. The New 'Aladdin' Poster (from A. Chitwood, 2019)

Examining the poster interface, the new 'Aladdin' poster, as seen in Fig. 1, presents all the different characters: Aladdin with his monkey and the lamp, Princess Jasmine, Genie, the Sultan with his tiger, the Sorcerer Jafar with his a couple of

snakes. The colorful nature of the one-sheet poster symbolizes the context that is intended to be communicated.

In this study, all semiotic modes in the image of the poster are treated as language, conveying intended messages. The indicators of data were made with visual means as a basis. The meaning of every semiotic mode that is signs is based on Chinese culture setting the story. Thus, the Chinese culture shared in the image determines the way how the rhetorical craft is being interpreted.

B. Adapted Theories

Related theories adapted cover social semiotics and persuasion. Jewitt and Ayoma's theory contributes to the way images are being treated. The descriptive framework of Kress and van Leeuwen is used to bring out implied meaning in images. In this framework, visual social semiotics is perceived as the language with three metafunctions: representational, interactive and compositional, extended from Halliday's postulates on language metafunctions.

Since images offer modal affordance to children to do a particular action, visual means of images [14] supply resources to stimulate children to perform certain evaluations. With both presentation and analogy persuasive strategies, children's beliefs are set through cultural settings: religion and truth conditions. Cultural senses are shared through this means [8].

C. Data Processing and Analysis

The study covered two main stages: data collection and analysis. After observing data as a whole, logged data were filtered to limit the scope of the investigation. Social semiotic modes observed were icons or animated, color and position. For the procedural investigation, data were treated as follow:

1. examine the connection or contrast of social semiotic modes in the image. That linked-to indirect analysis of each characterization;
2. introduce concepts for each symbolic semiotic mode to interpret and to describe meanings;
3. define semiotic modes of the image in Chinese cultural context, including significance and meaning by revisiting the complete visual records; and
4. describe how evaluation had been done through constructing experiences using imagination.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

The visual social semiotics of the new 'Aladdin' poster serves resources; functioning semiotic modes, including all the forms of signs, in the image as *representational*, *interactive*, and *compositional*. The communicational requirements of the image act as a communication system in which the enactment of social relation is performed. This system is represented in a structured and coherent poster as a text.

According to the poster, Fig 1, iconic participants are represented by character Aladdin, Princess Jasmine, Genie, the Sultan, the Sorcerer Jafar, Monkey, Tiger, and Snakes. The color of orange, blue and black set the setting nature. The castle opened field, and the sorcerer's residence makes a setting complete. Tabel I provides semiotic codes of the Aladdin poster in Fig 1 with their semiotic affordances.

TABLE I. VISUAL SOCIAL SEMIOTIC METAFUNCTIONS

Representational		Interactive	Compositional
Participants: Aladdin The Princess Jasmine Genie The Sultan The Sorcerer Jafar Monkey Tiger Snakes	conceptual Social class Possessive attributes	Contact interactive: direct for Genie and the Sorcerer, and indirect for Aladdin, the Princess and the Sultan	Information: Aladdin takes a center, left (given information) for the castle, right (new information) for Genie, and bottom for the Sorcerer
	Narrative: Vectors are all participants, color, place, the direction of the look	Social distance: Different size of the frame Point of view: Center, right- left, top- bottom with horizontal and vertical axis	

Representational Metafunction

As for narrative structure, participants as actors act as inter-actors in a transactional bidirectional action; the actors play a specific role in visual communication interaction. Aladdin appears holding a lamp that symbolized the existence of Genie, and monkey sitting on his shoulder presents the intimate relationship they have. Aladdin is positioned in between orange and blue sides. Meanwhile, Princess Jasmine on the back of Aladdin is represented as a symbol of prosperity of the castle together with the Sultan and his tiger. He raises both his hands as if he is protecting what he has to. The side is colored by orange. On the other side, Genie is represented in a blue nuisance. He is looking directly at the front. He belongs to the open area symbolizing freedom. Finally, the Sorcerer Jafar is illustrated by the black color accompanied by a couple of snakes. He is holding a stick with the head of the snake on top. As a whole, the *reactional* process is indicated through non-transactional (the glance directed toward something else in the poster frame) and transactional (directed toward another participant: Genie and the Sorcerer).

As for conceptual structure, on the other hand, the image shows social class: dominant (the Sultan and the Princess) and dominated (Aladdin). The possessive attributes are represented through the relationship between Aladdin-Monkey, Aladdin-the lamp representing Genie, the Sultan-Tiger, and the Sorcerer-Snakes.

Interactive Metafunction

The image analyzed establishes partial an imaginary relation between Genie-viewers and the Sorcerer-viewers using *demand* act (directed look at the viewers). On the other hand, Aladdin, Princess Jasmine and the Sultan perform *offer* acts (address viewers indirectly). To continue, social distance is represented by the size of iconic participants: Aladdin, Genie and Princess Jasmine are presented in close-up size. It leads to a close social distance. In the point of view of interactive functions, Aladdin is placed in the center of the frame. The position of Princess Jasmine and Genie support Aladdin's.

Compositional Metafunction

The image is composed of a horizontal and vertical axis with Aladdin in the center. It means that Aladdin is treated as the nucleus of information. Supporting Aladdin's character,

Princess Jasmine and the Sultan with his tiger are placed in the top-left side. In this sense, the Princess and the Sultan are treated as given information from which the story begins. The top position itself illustrates a promise, an ideal position. On the other hand, placing Genie as new information indicated by the position of the top-right side describes that Genie is special attention; he is an ideal future. Finally, the Sorcerer posted on the bottom describes his practical information. To conclude, the framing shows that the participants are interconnected to create a story.

B. Discussion

As briefly described, the image illustrates a story with the characters involved. Considering the iconic Aladdin, he is the central message; the story tells about him and his adventures. The charming street rat Aladdin, so called, is illustrated as a thief with caring for others. He gives his hand to his fellow poor and hungry people. His traits may not be a good role model but at the same time, he can be a role model. His experience in finding a lamp encourages him to a great adventure. The lamp symbolizing the existence of Genie gives him the hope to reach the ideal future, that is, the highest rank of society. Simply, Aladdin's character illustrates himself as a main topic. The types of representational action are transactional bidirectional where Aladdin as inter-actor communicates a specific message to the audience or netizen [7, 11].

Accompanied by the monkey, which symbolizes clever and roguish character in Chinese culture, Aladdin pursues his future with help from Genie as a representation. In achieving the highest rank of society, he gets involved with Princess Jasmine, a courageous and self-determined daughter of the Sultan. The Sultan's tiger represents a wealthy and power. Inter-actors with prosperity attributes represent themselves in terms of their class structure [7, 12].

In order to create excitement in adventure, the Sorcerer Jafar presents practical information that usually comes along with polarity case. He acts as a bad character. His character is supported by his possession, the couple snakes symbolizing the servant of the sky. Jafar's values are depicted through Jafar's visuals are; that is bottom. The bottom position gives an idea that Jafar's values are communicated in order to support the essence and the promise of the poster, which is Aladdin [7].

In order to interpret the color given, orange as a background of the castle symbolizes bravery, happiness, love, healthy and optimist. Psychologically, however, orange stimulates hyperactive. The blue color is used to make it balance. Blue represents professional, intellectual, self-esteem, and powerful. Finally, black color represents a gloomy, dark and frightening emotion. This color has created a dramatic and mysterious setting. The colors differ one element to others to bring clues toward meaning communicated. This communicative system is introduced as salience in the composition of visual [7].

As a complete text, the image of the new 'Aladdin' poster invites children as viewers to be involved in a certain level of interpretation. Facilitating various semiotic modes with different affordances, the image stimulates emotion and imagination to evaluate events. This experience may develop moral maturity in children. Children can judge specific

behaviors along with the consequences. As Hissan's suggestion, characters (inter-actors) in stories help children to experience events and to understand other's reactions if they conduct specific actions in a certain way [10].

IV. CONCLUSION

To summarize, social semiotics and persuasion have provided various instruments to investigate the intended meanings of movie poster ads. Although interpretation results in contextual-dependent meaning, this study offers a conception that a movie poster, as persuasive technology, may be used to promote social and moral values intended to be passed from generation to generation. A model of the persuasive device is created. For further research, the analysis of the image may be conducted using an analysis discourse of multimodality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Universitas Komputer Indonesia has supported this study. For exploring this issue, the authors acknowledge scholars' insights and perspectives initiated. My highly appreciations are extended to my students who are interested in this field.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. Ganz, "The Power of Story in Social Movement," Manuscript for the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Anaheim, California, available online https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/27306251/Power_of_Story-in-Social-Movements.pdf?sequence=1. 2001
- [2] M. Munoz-Calvo, "Translation and Cross-Cultural Communication," in M. Munoz-Clavo and C. Buesa-Gomez (eds.), *Translation and Cultural Identity: Selected Essays on Translation and Cross-Cultural Communication*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 1, 2010.
- [3] R. Barthes, "S/Z", Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970.
- [4] S. Burset, E. Bosch, and JT Pujola, "A Study of Multimodal Discourse in the Design of Interactive Digital Material for Language Learning," in A. Pareja-Lora, C. Calle-Martinex and P. Rodriguez-Arancon (eds), *New Perspectives on Teaching and Working with Languages in the Digital Era*, Dublin: Research-Publishing.net, pp. 166, 2016.
- [5] G.D.S. Costa and A.C. Xavier, "Critical Visual Literacy: the New Phase of Applied Linguistics in the Era of Mobile Technology," in A. Pareja-Lora, C. Calle-Martinex and P. Rodriguez-Arancon (eds), *New Perspectives on Teaching and Working with Languages in the Digital Era*, Dublin: Research-Publishing.net, pp. 201 - 212, 2016.
- [6] C. Jewitt and R. Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," in T. van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt (eds), *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, London: Sage Publication, pp. 134, 2001.
- [7] C.E. Stoian, "Analysing Images: A Social Semiotic Perspective," in *Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timisoara Transactions on Modern Languages*, Vol. 14(1), pp. 23 – 30, 2015.
- [8] B. Johnstone, "Linguistic Strategies and Cultural Styles for Persuasive Discourse," in S. Ting-Toomey and F. Korzeny (eds), *Language, Communication, and Culture: Current Directions (International and Intercultural Communication Annual XIII)*, Beverly Hills: Sage, pp. 139 – 156, 1989.
- [9] A. Slon. "Image Schemata and the Elaboration of Events," in B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (ed), *Cognitive Perspectives on Language*, Germany: Peter Lang GmbH, pp. 102, 1999.
- [10] W.S.M. Hissan, "An Analysis of the Children's Characters in Roald Dahl's Novel: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," in *Indonesia Journal of Applied Linguistic*, Vol. 2(1), pp. 84, July 2012.
- [11] N. Stevenson and C. Inskip, "Visualising London," in *London Journal of Tourism, Sport and Creative Industries*, Vol. 1(1), pp.3 – 12, 2008.
- [12] G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, "Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design," London: Routledge, 1996, 2006.
- [13] A. Chitwood, "New 'Aladdin' Poster Teases a Whole New World," available online <http://collider.com/aladdin-new-poster/>. March 12, 2019
- [14] G. Kress, "Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Communication," London: Routledge, 2010.