DECODING MOTIVATION: VERBAL & VISUAL SIGNIFICATION IN SPORT POSTERS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the semiotic elements found in motivational sport posters by examining how verbal and visual signs construct motivational meaning. Drawing on semiotic theories by Chandler (2007), Barthes (1968), and Cerrato (2012), the study explores how texts, images, and colors function to evoke values such as passion, discipline, and determination in a sporting context. Data were collected from Pinterest through observation and note-taking methods. Verbal signs such as motivational slogans and visual signs including athlete imagery, color schemes, and body language were classified and analyzed based on their denotative and connotative meanings. The findings reveal that motivational sport posters use a synergistic combination of visual and verbal cues to influence viewer emotion and behavior. This research contributes to the understanding of how motivational messages are constructed and interpreted within visual communication, particularly in sports culture.

Keywords: Motivation, Sport Posters, Verbal and visual signs

I INTRODUCTION

Meaning can be understood through language and symbols, so the study of semiotics is very relevant. Semiotics is the study of signs and how they shape meaning. In semiotics, meaning is not only seen as something inherent in the symbol itself, but also a result of the relationship between the sign, the object, and the interpreter. These signs can be words, images, signs, or other objects that have meaning in a particular context (Chandler, 2022: pp. 2-3, 20-21). By understanding the structure and workings of signs, semiotics helps us understand how meaning is constructed through a process of interpretation influenced by culture, experience, and social situation.

Semiotics, as a science that studies signs and symbols, can also provide a powerful framework to analyze the content of motivational posters. According to Saussure (1916/1959, pp. 66–67) and Peirce (1931–1958, CP 2.228), every sign is understood as a unity between the signifier (its physical form) and the signified (the concept it represents). Motivational sports posters inextricably combine text and images to convey messages such as discipline, determination and perseverance to fans and athletes. While visual communication has been widely researched in the context of advertising and branding, semiotic analysis specific to sports motivational posters is rare.

Hanafi (2021) analyzed the semiotic meanings of emoticon symbols and explored students' perspectives on their use in WhatsApp Messenger conversations by applying Peirce's semiotic theory. Meanwhile, Mega (2022) examined the messages embedded within the verbal and nonverbal aspects of the Suspiria movie poster using Barthes' semiotic theory. Furthermore, Damayanti (2021) analyzed the myths represented in the advertisement *Who Says No to Mentos* through Barthes' semiotic framework. In addition, Yanti (2023) investigated the types of signs as well as the denotative and connotative meanings found in images uploaded by WHO on Instagram related to Covid-19, employing the semiotic theories of Saussure and Barthes. Moreover, Saputra (2023) identified verbal signs in fast-food advertisements and analyzed their meanings based on Barthes' concept of the signifier and the signified.

In line with these previous studies, several recent researchers have also explored semiotic analyses in various visual media using similar theoretical approaches. Sukma (2025) analyzed two movie posters of Everything Everywhere All at Once by applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory (icon, index, symbol) and Roland Barthes' framework (denotation, connotation). Similarly, Nurwanti (2024) examined semiotic elements in the *Ipar adalah Maut* movie poster by employing Saussure's semiotic theory enriched with Darmaprawita's color theory and Barthes' concepts of the relationship between signifier and signified, as well as denotative and connotative meanings. Furthermore, Panggabean (2025) investigated political campaign posters from Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election using Peirce's semiotic theory (icon, index, symbol) to identify and interpret the meanings of the signs represented. Moreover, Purba (2021) analyzed the representation of meaning in the Wardah advertisement *I am the Face of Indonesia* using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to reveal the denotative and connotative layers that construct the image of elegance and confidence among Indonesian women. Finally, Sadono (2023) examined the Tempo magazine cover (October 25–31, 2021 edition) using Roland Barthes' structural

semiotics to uncover the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings constructed by Tempo in representing the internal presidential candidacy dynamics within PDI-P.

This study fills the gap by specifically focusing on sport content in motivational sport posters, positioning the poster medium as a motivational tool rather than merely an informational or promotional one. It further examines how text and imagery function semiotically, drawing upon the semiotic theory developed by Chandler (2007) and Barthes (1968) to analyze both verbal and visual signs, uncovering the connotative and denotative meanings embedded in the posters and revealing how semiotic elements construct motivational messages for the audience.

This study aims to analyze the semiotic tools using in the semiotic analysis of motivational posters, which provides an interesting framework for observing how signs and symbols convey motivational messages. Saussure (1857-1913) stated that a sign consists of two main components: the signifier, which is the physical form of the sign such as a word or image and the signified, which is the meaning or concept associated with the sign. In motivational sport posters, verbal and visual signs combine to convey inspiring and uplifting messages. Sports-themed motivational posters combine text and images to create messages that encourage discipline, determination and perseverance for fans and athletes. While current research has highlighted the role of visual communication in advertising and branding, little has specifically addressed the semiotic analysis of sports motivational posters. This study explores how such semiotic devices are able to shape meaning and influence people's motivation. Through a semiotic analysis approach, this study seeks to understand the relationship between visual and textual elements, and uncover the messages hidden behind these sports motivational posters.

II MATERIALS AND METHOD

The data source of this study was taken from Pinterest platform (https://pinterest.com), which was chosen as a medium to find motivational sport posters to be analyzed. The posters analyzed were specifically taken from the period 2022 to 2024, as this duration is the most recent and suitable, showing how the spirit of sports returned to normal after the pandemic and offering the right timeframe to analyze the motivational messages within them. The data sources in this study will be used five motivational sport posters to analyze. The observation process was carried out systematically by analyzing the verbal and visual signs contained in the posters. The data collected was then classified based on visual and verbal content. Verbal signs include written text or messages, while visual signs include images, illustrations, and color schemes. Each element was recorded using the note-taking method, and then analyzed based on denotative and connotative meanings by relating all elements to the motivational context of the sports poster. To maintain the accuracy of the data and avoid interpretive bias, active discussions were conducted between researchers. Solid collaboration was applied as a mitigation measure against potential misinterpretation and to ensure the objectivity of the analysis. In the analysis process, this research utilizes an initial framework based on semiotic theory developed by Chandler (2007) and Barthes (1968), which divides signs into two levels of meaning: denotative and connotative. Both types of verbal and visual signs on motivational sport posters were analyzed using these theoretical approaches to reveal their implied and explicit meanings. In addition, to understand the role of color in building motivational effects, this study also refers to the color theory proposed by Cerrato (2012). The methodology used in this study is observational, with a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in formal and informal formats to provide a thorough understanding of the meaning and messages contained in motivational sport posters

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, three key semiotic frameworks are applied to explore the meanings of verbal and visual signs in motivational sport posters. First, Chandler's semiotic theory (2007) provides general principles for understanding how signs, both verbal and visual, construct meaning. Second, Barthes' theory (1968) distinguishes between denotative (literal) and connotative (cultural or contextual) meanings, allowing for deeper interpretation of both textual and visual elements. Third, Cerrato's theory on color (2012) is used to examine the symbolic role of color in visual communication, especially how it evokes emotions, values, and motivational messages. Each framework offers a distinct perspective for analyzing the components of motivational sport posters. For the verbal signs, such as motivational texts or slogans, Barthes' framework is applied to analyze both their explicit (denotative) and implied (connotative) meanings. For the visual signs, elements such as images of athletes, action poses, symbols, backgrounds, and color schemes are

analyzed using a combination of Barthes' semiotic theory and Cerrato's color theory to uncover how these visual elements shape viewer perception and emotional impact.

Data 1

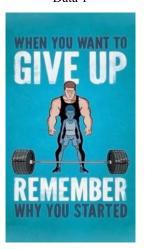


Figure 1. Motivational sport poster Source: https://pin.it/2gSOrWqMp

This motivational sport poster uses a combination of verbal and visual cues as a medium to convey a message that invites one and gives positive emotions to the reader. The texts "When you want to give up" and "Remember why you started" serve as verbal cues that convey the meaning of struggle and perseverance. The sentence provides the deepest meaning for someone who is pursuing sports activities. A person sometimes has thoughts of giving up and making his spirit decline due to heavy physical exercise, pain, fatigue, and a long process. However, a person remembers the original reason they started whether they want to increase their confidence, achieve certain targets to become healthier or even prove their own confidence.

Motivation can fade and grow again, but remember that every little step you take in your training is an important part of your journey that should not be wasted. The meaning of this sentence also applies in various aspects of daily life such as work, education, and self-development. Feeling tired and doubtful is natural but remembering the original goal can help one understand the process of facing challenges is a process towards progress. Giving up may seem like the easy way out but perseverance and consistency build character. Even in sports if we survive is a form of success that is not visible but very meaningful.

This poster features a visual of two male figures who have different body shapes. The thin man in the foreground is the initial undeveloped condition, while the muscular man in the background illustrates the end result of the transformation process that has been passed diligently and consistently. Therefore, it gives meaning that a process will provide change. Between the two figures is a large barbell with a heavy weight, symbolically depicting the hard work and challenges that must be faced in the process of achieving goals. Within the framework of semiotic theory, images carry not only denotative meanings, but also deeper connotative meanings. As explained by Chandler (2007), visuals in the media do not stand alone, but form a network of signs that are interrelated and influenced by social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the visual elements in this poster can be read as a narrative of a journey from weakness to strength, from a weak beginning to a stronger achievement.

Color also plays an important role in shaping meaning, especially in semiotics. The use of a blue background on this poster not only serves as a decorative element, but also carries certain symbolic meanings. According to (Cerrato, 2012: pp. 11-12), blue is often associated with focus, calmness, and stability. In this poster, the blue color creates a calming atmosphere while supporting the main message of resilience and mental strength in the face of challenges. The color blue works synergistically with verbal and visual elements to create a cohesive and unified meaning. Thus, through the meaning in semiotics, it can be concluded that this motivational sports poster not only conveys the message directly, but also constructs meaning through a complex and interrelated system of signs. The interaction between text, images and colors creates a powerful motivational narrative that evokes emotions and reinforces the audience's intention to keep working towards their goals.

This poster conveys the message that in the midst of a challenging process or the urge to give up, one needs to recall the original goal that made them start in the first place. By remembering this motivation, it is hoped that there will be inner strength to persevere, continue the struggle, and not stop

halfway. This message aims to generate enthusiasm and belief that the process and efforts made have great meaning towards extraordinary achievements.

Data 2

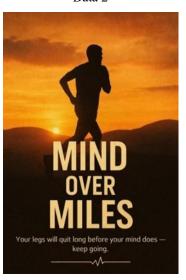


Figure 2. Motivational sport poster Source: https://pin.it/QRDE19Pax

This motivational poster combines verbal and visual to show how important mental strength is when we have physical limitations. Verbally, the main text "Mind over miles" serves as a marker that emphasizes that the mental strength we have is a very big role when we want to conquer challenges, especially in the field of sports of course someone has different endurance such as long-distance running, cycling, swimming or climbing. When someone is in a tired condition it is often not the muscles that make it last but the mind that remains focused and firm on the goal. The mind can provide the impetus to keep going, to keep going, even when the body feels like giving up. This teaches us that no matter how far we travel, if one is able to control their mind, they can even maintain their determination and maintain the reason why they started. It is not a matter of how fast or strong but how much the person believes in himself to finish what he has started.

Meanwhile, the sentence "Your legs will quit long before your mind does - keep going" gives a deeper meaning in the form of a strong encouragement for one not to give up easily on the fatigue that comes from the body. Sometimes a person starts to want to give up in many situations such as muscles start to ache, steps feel heavy or breathing starts to become irregular. However, it is not the end of the world, as long as one has the mind to still be aware of the goal and has the confidence to keep going, then one is still able to go further than what one thought. If one remembers that mental resilience such as consistency, patience and willingness to try make the difference between giving up and succeeding. The struggle can indeed be exhausting but as long as one has the mind to stay strong, then the journey at hand can still be continued. According to Barthes' theory (1968), text in a visual context function as an anchorage that anchors meaning and prevents overly broad or ambiguous interpretations, so that the message conveyed becomes more assertive and directed.

Visually, the poster features the silhouette of a runner in motion amidst a dramatic scene. The background is predominantly yellow, like a sunrise or sunset, The color yellow in a semiotic context has positive connotations such as hope, energy, and optimism (Cerrato, 2012: pp. 7-9). This element reinforces the emotional atmosphere established by the verbal message, connecting the visualization with the spirit of perseverance and progress. The presence of a horizontal heartbeat line below the text adds a symbolic dimension as a representation of life, passion, and undying drive.

In addition, the mountains seen in the distance create a visual symbol of the challenges or obstacles that must be overcome to reach the goal. Mountains, in many visual cultures, symbolize achievement, struggle and growth. This combination forms a profound visual narrative of an individual's journey from a starting point to success through determination and mental strength. In Chandler's (2007) view, such visual elements form a system of signs that work connotatively and reinforce each other's meaning, creating a visual experience that is not only engaging but also meaningful. Overall, the poster conveys the message that success is not only determined by physical strength, but more so by the mental ability to persevere, focus and not give up. Both verbally and visually, this message is built strongly and

consistently. The design elements work together to form a cohesive meaning, inspiring the audience to keep fighting despite adversity.

Data 3



Figure 3. Motivational sport poster Source: https://pin.it/15c9HjvAS

This motivational sports poster provides a powerful text about the relationship between challenge and love for an activity. The main phrase "It's really hard but i really like it" reflects a person who goes through something challenging and hard, but still does it with a genuine love for the process because they think it can be a source of inner satisfaction. In life sometimes not all the things we like will be easy to live with. It is precisely by often doing it with difficulty, sacrifice and long struggle that we will get the most meaningful things. But someone when really likes what he does, especially in the field of sports, if there are difficulties it is not a burden. This can also be found in daily activities such as work or small routines in life. This sentence means that there are a commitment and inner satisfaction that does not depend on how heavy or light it has to be.

Furthermore, this phrase shows emotional maturity and mental toughness in the face of challenges. The joy that comes with something gives it tremendous endurance. Not just because of the obstacles but because the meaning is greater than the fatigue. This is what makes a person continue to try to survive when others choose to retreat not only to pursue the end result but also to enjoy the bitter and sweet process in it. In life there is no instant process. In the context of Barthes' theory (1968), this text functions as an affirmation of meaning that directs the audience's perception to understand that struggle is a natural part of the process of loving what we do. Visually, the poster features an image of a swimmer moving vigorously beneath the surface of the water. There is no audience, just him and the water surrounding him.

The silence he feels beneath the surface gives intensity to his every move. It's not just about physical strength; it is about the mental strength of someone who keeps going despite being invisible to others. This image conveys a message of focus, consistency and resilience in solitude, that the greatest struggles often happen away from the sight of others. The straight and forward movement of the body reflects a clear direction, determination, and a goal that is not to be compromised. The water, which is both a pressure and a terrain for movement, symbolizes the challenges of life that one can sometimes feel can actually be a strength that is formed. The swimmer in this image is not fighting the water, but rather adapting to its rhythm and making it a journey. This illustrates that true growth occurs when one chooses to move forward in silence, under pressure, and without validation from others. Because in truth, a meaningful achievement is not about the cheers one gets but about resilience.

The color that dominates this poster is dark blue, which is psychologically associated with calmness, stability, and depth. Blue in a semiotic context is often associated with the process of introspection and self-control (Cerrato, 2012: pp. 11-12). This color not only functions aesthetically, but also helps to establish a deep and serious emotional atmosphere. Meanwhile, the white color of the text provides a sharp contrast, highlighting the main message and immediately grabbing the reader's attention. Overall, this poster conveys that even if something feels hard, if we truly love what we do, we will still do it wholeheartedly. This message is emphasized through complementary visuals and verbiage, creating a touching and inspiring impression. The combination of purposeful design elements reinforces the meaning of dedication and passion in the face of challenges, making this poster a visual representation of the power of determination and love for the process.

Data 4

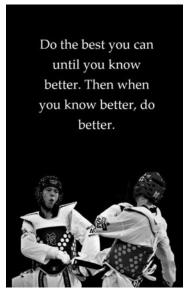


Figure 4. Motivational sport poster Source: https://pin.it/6xu7DXFhb

This poster conveys a sense of gradual self-growth. The phrase "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better" conveys that everyone has a starting point and it doesn't matter if it's not perfect at the beginning. The most important thing is to try to do something as much as possible with the current abilities. Because over time when someone learns new things, they must gain experience or realize mistakes that can be improved to be better than before.

This message conveys that self-growth is a process not something that happens overnight. No need to wait to be perfect to start, but start what can be done. It also provides a lesson that self-improvement is not a form of regret, but part of maturity and being open to change and willing to continue learning. In the context of Barthes' theory (1968), this text plays a role in giving direction to the meaning of the image not just as a complement, but as the main guide for the audience to understand that what is shown is not only a physical fight, but also a symbol of personal struggle in the process of self-improvement.

Visually, the image shows two taekwondo athletes who are competing not just showing physical action. Behind the match is a deeper meaning of a long journey towards better skills. This scene depicts serious momentum, focus, technique, and intense training. This image does not just show a match, but represents a long journey of training, failure, and improvement. The symbols in this visual such as facial expressions, protective clothing, and body movements reflect a deeper meaning of perseverance and self-improvement. It shows that becoming "better" is the result of repetition, dedication, and the courage to keep learning from every experience.

The choice of black and white colors in this poster creates a serious and emotionally powerful feel. Black symbolizes power, mystery, and depth of thought, while white reflects sincerity, honesty, and room to grow. According to (Cerrato, 2012: pp. 14-16) color theory, this combination is both bold and reflective. There are no flashy colors that can distract the focus, as the entire design is geared towards making the audience really pay attention to the content of the message and the meaning of the visuals displayed.

The message in this poster is not only motivational, but also builds awareness that becoming a better person is a never-ending process. Visual and verbal elements complement each other to create a powerful and inspiring meaning. Through the symbolism of sports, this poster provides a concrete illustration of the importance of consistent effort and the willingness to change as knowledge grows. This message is very relevant in everyday life, whether in the academic, professional or social fields.



Figure 5. Motivational sport poster Source: https://pin.it/libsCWDrc

The poster conveys a strong motivational message through the slogan "No pain, no gain", which means "no gain without pain." This phrase verbally represents that every great achievement and success requires struggle. No result comes easily or instantly - it's all a long process and hard work. Pain, fatigue, and challenges are all part of the process towards success. It is from this process that one learns to be stronger and grow into a better person. The sentence conveyed in this poster reminds us that the effort that feels hard today is part of the path to a greater goal.

More than just the spirit to practice or work hard, this text also teaches a person's patience and perseverance in dealing with the difficult times he goes through, but if they are able to get through it, the results will be worth the struggle. Not only in sports but also in education or other daily activities. This text is a reminder that pain is not a sign of stopping, but part of the process to grow According to Barthes's theory (1968), text in visual media functions as a marker that gives direction to the interpretation of images. In this context, the large and bold text "No Pain, No Gain" reinforces the visual meaning and avoids ambiguity in interpretation. The placement of the text just above and covering part of the athlete's body also shows that this sentence is not just a decoration, but a major part of the overall visual message.

Visually, the poster features a muscular man doing deadlifts with very heavy weights inside a gym. His serious facial expression and tense posture portray concentration, strength and determination. This image not only displays physical strength, but also implies the mental strength and discipline needed to achieve maximum results. In visual semiotics, images like this represent connotative meanings of struggle and dedication. The stooped position of the man's body with both hands tightly grasping the barbell reinforces the symbol of hard work done in real life. The bold illustration style and shadowy lines give a dramatic impression of the burden at hand.

This poster uses a dark color palette as the background, mainly dark blue and black, which gives it a serious and deep impression. The dark colors create an intense atmosphere, reflecting the heavy, concentrated atmosphere of the training. Meanwhile, beige or pale yellow is used on the main text to create contrast with the background, making the phrase "No Pain, No Gain" the main visual focus. According to Cerrato's (2012: 5, 11-12) theory of color psychology, beige gives the impression of warmth and stability, while dark blue reflects perseverance, discipline, and strength. This color combination is not only visually appealing, but also emphasizes that the process towards success requires fortitude in an often-stressful atmosphere.

All the elements in this poster, from the text, to the athlete illustrations, to the choice of colors, complement each other to convey one main message: success can only be achieved through painful and consistent effort. This message is not only relevant in the world of sports, but can also be applied in other aspects of life such as education, career, and personal development. The poster motivates the audience to not avoid pain or adversity, but instead embrace it as part of the process towards growth. The combination of verbal and visual aspects creates communication that is both emotionally touching and uplifting. The poster effectively illustrates that behind every great result; there is always pain that must be faced with determination.

IV CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the semiotic analysis of verbal and visual signs in sports motivational posters shows how messages of passion, perseverance and mental strength are shaped through a combination of words and images. The verbal cues in the posters serve to explicitly convey the main idea, shape a positive mindset, and encourage the audience to strive beyond their limits. Meanwhile, visual cues reinforce these messages through symbols, colors, expressions, and compositions that support the fighting spirit and resilience of individuals. The analysis shows that sports motivational posters contain a dominant ideology about the importance of process and effort as the main path to success.

The meanings constructed are not only informative, but also shape the audience's view of the body, strength and achievement through intense visual construction. In this context, signs work connotatively to instil the values of struggle and character building, which characterize sports culture. The implications of these findings open up opportunities to understand the role of posters as meaning-shaping media in everyday life. Sports motivational posters are not only visual tools, but also ideological communication tools that can direct behavior and shape the mindset of the audience.

Therefore, it is important for designers and visual communicators to pay attention to semiotic aspects in designing messages in order to touch the emotional and psychological dimensions of message recipients. This study confirms that semiotic analysis is an effective approach to exploring deep meaning in visual media. By understanding how texts and visuals work together to convey ideas, this study can provide a foundation for the development of stronger visual communication strategies in the future, especially in the context of motivation, education and self-development. Further research could extend the scope of this study to different cultures, ages, and visual preferences for a more comprehensive understanding.

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