

## A Semiotic Analysis in KFC Christmas Themed Advertisements

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**Abstract.** In modern marketing, advertisements act not only as promotional tools but also as cultural texts rich in symbolic meaning. This study analyzes how KFC's Christmas-themed advertisements employ semiotic signs to convey messages of warmth, celebration, and consumer engagement. Using a qualitative descriptive method with an observational approach, the research examines both verbal elements such as slogans and greetings and non-verbal components like imagery, color, and festive symbols. The analysis draws on Saussure's (1983) theory of signifier and signified, Barthes' (1972) concept of cultural myths, and Wierzbicka's (1996) interpretations of color symbolism. Findings reveal that KFC effectively integrates textual and visual signs, including images of a fried chicken Christmas tree, red festive backgrounds, seasonal icons, and warm greetings to evoke emotional responses. These signs work together to associate the brand with traditional holiday values such as joy, togetherness, and generosity. By embedding its product within a culturally resonant and emotionally charged framework, KFC enhances the persuasive power of its advertisements. This study highlights the significance of analyzing both verbal and non-verbal elements to fully understand how meaning is constructed in advertising. It contributes to semiotic and marketing literature by illustrating how advertisements function as multidimensional texts that connect commercial aims with cultural narratives.

**Keywords:** advertising; christmas; cultu; semiotics; verbal and non-verbal signs; cultu

### Introduction

In modern visual communication, advertisements are not just tools for promotion but also cultural texts filled with meaning. Fast food ads like those from KFC during the Christmas season mix verbal and non-verbal elements to create persuasive messages that go beyond simply giving information. Language, images, colors, and music in these ads form a complex system of signs that work together. Because of this, semiotic analysis is useful to explore how meaning is built and shared through both verbal elements (such as text and slogans) and non-verbal ones (such as visuals, facial expressions, and symbols) in advertisements.

Saussure (1983) introduced a key concept in modern semiotics: the relationship between the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the meaning behind the sign). Meaning, according to Saussure, is not naturally attached to an object but is created through a system of language and signs, which are arbitrary. In this context, an advertisement can be seen as a "text" to be read by the audience, where every visual and textual element becomes part of a sign system that communicates certain ideas especially during Christmas, such as warmth, togetherness, and consumer joy. The problem formulation that the researcher wants to explain is the meaning of each sign found in KFC's fried chicken advertisements on the theme of Christmas. Saussure's idea that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. This means that there is no natural or logical connection between the sound of a word and its meaning. For instance, the word "table" does not have any intrinsic link to the physical object it refers to; instead, its meaning is established through social agreement within a language community.

The purpose of this study is to identify the verbal and non-verbal elements in the KFC Christmas

advertisement, analyze how their meanings are constructed using Saussure's semiotic theory, and examine how both types of signs work together to build the intended message for the audience. The authors chose the Christmas theme for discussion because Christmas is an interesting theme that has rarely been researched, and also to open up new developments that may help future researchers.

Several studies have been done related to this research topic. These previous studies were carried out by different researchers and institutions who were interested in similar subjects. They provide useful information, ideas, and methods that help support and guide this current research. The results from those earlier studies also show that this topic is important and worth studying further. The first relevant study is was conducted by Januartha et al. (2024), entitled "Semiotic Analysis: Decoding Signs and Messages on Grand Filano YouTube Ads" who analyzed a YouTube advertisement for the Grand Filano motorbike. This study applied a qualitative semiotic approach, using theories from Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, along with color theory insights from Wierzbicka. Through careful observation of the advertisement, the researchers identified various textual and visual components, such as written slogans, on-screen text, facial expressions, background settings, and color combinations. Their analysis revealed that color played a significant role in delivering the message, with bright colors like yellow and pink symbolizing energy, confidence, and youthfulness, while softer colors such as white and beige were used to convey purity, elegance, and a luxurious feel. This shows how verbal, visual, and chromatic elements work together to create a strong brand image.

The second study was carried out by Nurwati et al. (2024), under the title "A Semiotic Analysis of the Promotional Poster for 'Ipar adalah Maut.'" This research used a qualitative method, with Saussure's semiotic theory as the main analytical framework. In addition, the study incorporated Roland Barthes' ideas of signifier and signified and used Darmaprawita's theory of color. The researchers analyzed visual features such as character illustrations, props, and background elements, and interpreted both the surface-level (denotative) and deeper (connotative) meanings. The results indicated that the poster does more than just advertise the story it also conveys emotional tones and hidden narratives through symbolic visual choices that reflect the tension and message of the film.

The third is study, conducted by Zhang and Wu (2023), entitled "Multimodal Metaphor Analysis in Perfume Commercials: Fragrance as Attraction, Emotion, and Object," focused on how metaphors in perfume advertisements construct meaning across multiple modes. Using the framework of conceptual and multimodal metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) and Forceville (2009), the researchers identified three main metaphorical categories: FRAGRANCE IS ATTRACTION, FRAGRANCE IS EMOTION, and FRAGRANCE IS OBJECT. Through qualitative analysis of six international perfume commercials from brands such as Gucci, Dior, and Chanel, the study examined how visual, auditory, and linguistic modes map abstract olfactory experiences into perceivable forms. The findings revealed that due to the inability to directly transmit scent, perfume advertisements utilize visual imagery, music, and narration to evoke sensory associations, transforming "scent" into a more abstract target while making "attraction" and "emotion" the concrete sources. This study highlights how multimodal metaphors effectively communicate the sensory and emotional appeal of perfumes, providing new insights into the semiotic construction of olfactory meaning in advertising.

The fourth is article, written by Pramitha et al (2025), entitled "Semiotic Analysis in Yamaha Fazzio of Verbal and Visual Signs in Advertisement" focused on a semiotic study of the Yamaha Fazzio advertisement. The researchers used Roland Barthes' theory of denotation, connotation, and myth to study how various elements in the ad such as slogans, product descriptions, colors, imagery, and layout design interact to form a strong and appealing brand narrative. Using a descriptive qualitative method, they observed seven scenes from the advertisement and analyzed how literal meanings (such as product features) were combined with deeper symbolic meanings that represent urban lifestyle, technology, individuality, and youth culture. They also used Wierzbicka's theory on the cultural and psychological meanings of color to further understand how specific visual choices like the use of orange to show enthusiasm or white to symbolize cleanliness help create a positive

emotional response in the audience.

The final study was conducted by Andriani et al. (2024), with titled “A Semiotic Analysis of Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs in Harassment Awareness Posters” who analyzed four harassment awareness posters found on Pinterest. This study used a combination of Saussure’s semiotic theory, Barthes’ model of denotation and connotation, and Cerrato’s color theory to understand how both verbal and non-verbal elements work together in these posters. The researchers identified a total of five verbal and seventeen non-verbal signs, including important visual elements such as silhouettes, symbolic illustrations, and color choices. They found that the color red was often used to signal danger or urgency, black to reflect trauma and seriousness, blue to represent trust and calmness, and pink to promote empowerment. The posters used strong textual messages like “Say No to Sexual Harassment” and powerful images such as faceless figures or people breaking free from constraints to express themes of consent, resistance, and awareness. These findings show how visual dominance can make awareness campaigns more impactful and emotionally resonant.

## Methods

This study used a qualitative descriptive method with an observational approach to analyze Christmas themed advertisements by KFC. The ads were selected through a Google search because they feature a rich mix of verbal and non-verbal elements, making them suitable for semiotic analysis. These advertisements promote KFC’s fried chicken by incorporating Christmas related symbols, colors, and language. The researchers observed the advertisements without making any modifications, aiming to identify and interpret the signs used and how they create meaning. To support the analysis, they also reviewed relevant articles and previous research related to semiotics and advertising. Data collection involved identifying all verbal elements such as written text, slogans, and product names as well as non-verbal elements like visuals, colors, and imagery. Each of these components was categorized based on its role and function in the advertisements.

The analysis was guided by Saussure (1983) semiotic theory, especially his concepts of the signifier and the signified, to understand how the ads convey messages through language and imagery. Barthes (1972) concept of cultural myths and Wierzbicka (1996) theory was also applied to interpret the meaning of colors, particularly in how certain colors reflect emotions or cultural values related to Christmas. The analysis was carried out in two stages: first, each element was examined individually to understand its basic meaning; then, the interaction between all verbal and visual components was interpreted to uncover the overall message of the advertisements. Special attention was given to the use of red, white, and gold colors often associated with holiday traditions and emotions like joy, warmth, and celebration. The findings were presented in two formats: a formal presentation using visuals taken from the ads, and an informal written explanation that explored the meanings more deeply based on the applied theories. This approach aimed to show how KFC’s Christmas advertisements communicate their message through a thoughtful combination of signs, helping readers gain a deeper understanding of how advertising can influence audiences on multiple levels.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged in order to clarify its scope. First, the data is limited to advertisements found through Google searches, which may not represent the full scope of KFC’s global Christmas campaign. Second, the cultural interpretation focuses on Western and Christian traditions commonly associated with Christmas, without exploring local meanings or alternative cultural readings. These limitations are intentional in order to maintain a focused and manageable scope, but should be considered when interpreting the findings and their implications in a broader context.

## Result and Discussion

As part of the research process, a total of seven different KFC advertisements with a Christmas theme were successfully collected by conducting an online search, primarily through the Google search engine. These advertisements were retrieved from various digital platforms where KFC actively publishes its promotional content, including its official website, social media channels, and other publicly accessible digital spaces. The

decision to focus on Christmas-themed advertisements was based on the unique combination of festive imagery and persuasive language typically used during the holiday season, which is rich in both verbal and non-verbal signs. After all the advertisement samples were gathered, the researcher conducted a careful and systematic review of the visual and textual content contained in each one. This initial review served as a screening process to determine which advertisements most clearly reflected the use of signs that could be interpreted from a semiotic perspective. From the seven advertisements collected, three were selected for further, in depth analysis. The selection was made based on the level of clarity, richness, and relevance of the verbal and non-verbal elements presented in those particular ads.

These three were considered the most representative in terms of how they use language, color, symbols, and imagery to convey a persuasive and emotionally engaging message to the audience. The analysis of these advertisements was carried out using the semiotic framework developed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1983), which focuses on the fundamental relationship between the signifier (the form of a sign, such as a word or image) and the signified (the concept or idea that the sign represents). Saussure's theory views meaning as something constructed through the combination of these two components, operating within a larger system of cultural and linguistic codes. By applying Saussure's model, this research seeks to understand how meaning is created through both the verbal cues (such as slogans, greetings, and taglines) and non-verbal cues (including colors, objects, layout, and symbols) found in the selected KFC advertisements. Each element is treated as a potential sign that, when decoded, can reveal how the advertisement communicates certain values, emotions, or cultural references. The aim is not only to describe what is seen or read in the advertisements, but to interpret the deeper meanings and associations that the signs may evoke in the minds of the viewers especially within the context of Christmas, a holiday often tied to themes such as warmth, togetherness, joy, and celebration. This combination of qualitative selection and theoretical analysis allows the study to go beyond surface-level descriptions, offering insights into how visual and textual signs work together to shape consumer perceptions and reinforce brand identity through symbolic storytelling.



**Figure 1.** KFC Christmas Advertisement Featuring Fried Chicken Bucket, Red Background, and Reindeer Ornaments as Symbols of Warmth.

The KFC Christmas advertisement in Figure 1 presents several visual and textual elements that, when combined, create a warm and festive message. These elements include a bucket of fried chicken, a dominant red background, Christmas-themed ornaments like reindeer decorations, and the text "Let the magical wonder of Christmas fill your life with joy!" as well as the greeting "Merry Christmas." All of these are signs that carry deeper meaning beyond what appears on the surface. One of the most prominent visual signs is the bucket of fried chicken, which takes center stage in the advertisement. This image is not just a product representation, but also acts as a symbol of warmth, comfort, and sharing. According to Saussure's semiotic theory, the image of the bucket serves as a signifier that points to broader concepts or signifieds. In this context, the bucket can represent the act of gathering, family togetherness, and the joy of eating with loved ones during the holiday season. Fried chicken becomes more than just food it becomes a shared experience that brings people closer,

especially during special occasions like Christmas.

Another strong non-verbal element is the use of a red background throughout the ad. This color has powerful associations with emotions such as love, energy, and happiness. According to Wierzbicka (1996), red is not only seen, but felt it often triggers emotional responses. In many cultures, red is also linked to celebration, especially during festive seasons like Christmas. The red background in this ad helps create a cheerful and warm atmosphere, while also grabbing attention and emphasizing the product at the center.

The presence of reindeer decorations in the visual layout adds another layer of meaning. In Western culture, reindeer are often associated with Christmas stories, especially the tale of Santa Claus and his flying sleigh. Referring to Barthes (1972) theory, which explains how everyday symbols can carry deeper cultural myths, the reindeer acts as a reminder of childhood wonder and the fantasy of Christmas. It invites the audience to emotionally reconnect with the magic of the season, making the advertisement feel more nostalgic and joyful. On the verbal side, the sentence “Let the magical wonder of Christmas fill your life with joy!” plays a key role. This phrase is not just informative it’s persuasive. According to Saussure, language works as a system of signs, where meanings are formed through cultural and emotional associations. Words like “magical wonder” and “joy” are emotionally loaded, triggering feelings of happiness, excitement, and anticipation. They help position the product not just as something to eat, but as part of a memorable and meaningful holiday experience.

The phrase “Merry Christmas” is a simple yet effective verbal sign. It carries cultural significance and reflects values like unity, happiness, and tradition. This short message helps strengthen the emotional tone of the ad, reminding viewers of the spirit of giving and celebration. It also helps the product blend into the broader narrative of Christmas as a joyful time to gather and share. In conclusion, both the visual and verbal signs in this advertisement work together to communicate a message that is deeper than just food promotion. The fried chicken bucket becomes a symbol of closeness and celebration, the red color adds emotional energy, the reindeer invites nostalgia and wonder, while the written messages emphasize joy, magic, and tradition.

By using familiar holiday symbols, warm imagery, and emotionally resonant language, the advertisement effectively creates a strong emotional connection with its audience. It taps into the collective nostalgia and joy associated with the Christmas season, encouraging viewers to associate the KFC brand not just with food, but with the comfort, warmth, and happiness of spending time with loved ones during the holidays. This emotional appeal helps position KFC as a meaningful part of festive traditions and shared moments.



**Figure 2.** KFC Christmas Advertisement Depicting Fried Chicken Shaped Like a Christmas Tree with a Star on Top.

The verbal element prominently featured in Figure 2 is the phrase “Merry Christmas.” Although brief, this phrase plays a crucial role in establishing the festive atmosphere of the advertisement. It invokes feelings of warmth, joy, and communal celebration, which are culturally associated with the Christmas holiday Barthes (1972). From a semiotic perspective, this verbal sign functions as a signifier that represents broader cultural meanings of festivity and togetherness, helping viewers quickly relate the advertisement to the Christmas



season Saussure (1983). The phrase acts as a linguistic cue that enhances emotional engagement and strengthens the connection between the product and the holiday spirit.

The advertisement's visual elements serve as important signifiers that convey symbolic meanings. The most notable is the fried chicken arranged in the shape of a Christmas tree. This visual is a creative reinterpretation of a culturally significant symbol. According to Saussure's semiotic theory, a signifier is the physical form such as an image or word that conveys a mental concept, or signified Saussure, (1983). Here, the tree shape suggests celebration, tradition, and festivity. Rather than simply seeing a food item, viewers interpret the shape through culturally learned associations with Christmas trees, which embody the spirit of holiday gatherings and joyful occasions. This recontextualization enhances the emotional resonance of the product by embedding it within a meaningful cultural event.

At the top of the chicken tree is a star, which visually recalls the Bethlehem star, a powerful symbol in Christian tradition. The star functions as a signifier that evokes meanings of hope, guidance, and spiritual significance (Barthes, 1972). Its placement atop the tree links the advertisement to longstanding religious and cultural narratives of Christmas, thus enriching the product's symbolism. Rather than serving as a mere decoration, the star functions as a symbolic bridge between traditional spiritual values and modern consumer culture. Its presence implies that the product is not just a commercial item, but part of the broader emotional and symbolic narrative of the holiday season evoking themes of hope, guidance, and shared meaning that resonate deeply with viewers during this time of year.

The background color of the advertisement, a bright red, also carries significant semiotic weight. According to Wierzbicka (1996), red universally communicates intense emotions such as excitement, love, passion, and joy. Within the context of Christmas, red is a culturally entrenched color, commonly associated with festive decorations and Santa Claus's attire. The use of red as the background color amplifies the advertisement's festive tone, as red is widely associated with warmth, passion, and the spirit of the holiday season. This deliberate visual strategy not only draws attention but also reinforces feelings of comfort and joy. By doing so, it primes viewers to subconsciously associate the product with positive emotions and the cheerful, celebratory atmosphere that characterizes the holidays, making the brand feel more emotionally resonant and seasonally relevant.

In summary, the combination of the verbal phrase "Merry Christmas" and the visual signs the fried chicken shaped as a Christmas tree, the star, and the red background creates a complex network of meanings that go beyond simple product promotion. Drawing on Saussure's and Barthes's semiotic frameworks, the advertisement integrates traditional holiday symbols with the brand's product, thereby fostering an emotional connection that invites consumers to experience the joy and togetherness of Christmas through the consumption of KFC's food. This multilayered approach highlights how advertising can strategically use culturally significant signs to deepen the impact of its message.



**Figure 3.** KFC Christmas Advertisement Featuring Santa's Hand Holding a Fried Chicken Bucket.

The advertisement contains several verbal and visual signs that work together to create meaning and evoke the festive spirit of Christmas. Starting with the verbal signs, the phrase “Merry Christmas from KFC” is a straightforward greeting that immediately connects the brand to the Christmas holiday. According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1983:67), words are signifiers the physical form of the sign and they evoke signifieds, or the ideas behind them. In this case, the phrase “Merry Christmas” signals celebration, goodwill, and festivity. By adding “from KFC,” the advertisement links these positive feelings directly to the brand, making KFC part of the joyful holiday experience.

Another verbal sign is “May your holidays be as delightful as your favorite bites with us.” This sentence invites the audience to associate the pleasure of eating KFC’s food with the happiness of the holiday season. It is designed to create an emotional connection by suggesting that KFC’s food can bring joy and comfort similar to what people feel during their favorite holiday moments. The word “delightful” emphasizes enjoyment and satisfaction, aiming to stimulate a desire for the product while reinforcing the warm feelings **associated with Christmas**. Moving to the non-verbal signs, the bucket of fried chicken is one of the most prominent images. This bucket is more than just a container of food; it symbolizes sharing, warmth, and indulgence. In many cultures, food during holidays is a symbol of togetherness and love Barthes (1972:115). The bucket here represents a communal experience where family and friends gather to enjoy meals together, reinforcing the idea of bonding during festive occasions. The Christmas tree depicted in the ad is a well known cultural symbol of Christmas, representing tradition, celebration, and the spirit of giving. According to Saussure (1983:70), the shape and imagery of the tree function as a signifier that brings to mind these rich cultural meanings. In advertising, using such a familiar symbol helps to create an emotional atmosphere and situates the product within a joyful and festive context.

Alongside the tree, the pile of gifts visually represents generosity and surprise, key themes during Christmas. Gifts are a symbol of kindness and celebration, encouraging viewers to feel that KFC can be part of their holiday traditions. This visual cue invites consumers to imagine KFC as part of their festive moments of giving and receiving. The image of Santa’s hand holding the bucket introduces an iconic figure who is universally recognized as a symbol of Christmas magic, joy, and generosity. Santa Claus, as Barthes (1972:130) explains, carries mythological meaning that evokes nostalgia and childlike wonder. His hand holding the KFC bucket ties the product to these emotions, suggesting that KFC brings a special kind of holiday magic to consumers. Additional elements like snow add to the festive mood by creating a typical winter scene associated with Christmas in many cultures. Snow is a signifier of the holiday season, evoking feelings of warmth and comfort inside homes during cold weather Wierzbicka (1996: 301). It contrasts with the hot, fresh fried chicken, encouraging viewers to associate the product with coziness and enjoyment amid the winter.

Lastly, the KFC logos are present to clearly identify the brand behind the festive message. This consistent brand placement ensures that all the positive feelings connected to the holiday symbols are linked directly to KFC, strengthening brand identity and recognition during a time when consumers are emotionally receptive. In conclusion, this KFC advertisement skillfully combines verbal greetings and familiar Christmas imagery to build a strong emotional appeal. The verbal signs invite warmth and joy, while the visual signs reinforce cultural meanings of celebration, sharing, and tradition. Together, these elements create a meaningful connection between the brand and the festive season, encouraging consumers to include KFC in their holiday celebrations.



**Figure 4.** KFC Christmas Advertisement Showcasing a Festive Meal Set with Bucket of Fried Chicken.

This study examines a Christmas themed advertisement by KFC through a semiotic lens, aiming to explore how the brand utilizes verbal and non-verbal signs to associate itself with the emotions and cultural myths of the holiday season. The analysis draws upon the theoretical frameworks of Saussure (1983), Barthes (1972), and Wierzbicka (1996), focusing on the way meaning is constructed and communicated through both linguistic and visual elements. At the center of the advertisement is a prominently displayed bucket of fried chicken, accompanied by fries, biscuits, cookies, side dishes, and a bottle of Pepsi. According to Saussure's semiotic theory, signs consist of a signifier and a signified Saussure (1983). In this case, the bucket of chicken functions as a signifier not only of food, but of warmth, celebration, and family togetherness. It connotes the idea of sharing a cultural practice deeply embedded in holiday traditions.

Through this visual element, KFC constructs a symbolic connection between its product and the collective emotional experience of Christmas. Color plays a vital role in this advertisement as well. The dominant red background, snowflake patterns, and stylized Christmas trees contribute to the overall festive atmosphere. As Wierzbicka (1996) points out, colors carry cultural and emotional meanings that extend beyond their visual appearance. Red, in particular, evokes emotions such as excitement, love, and festivity (Wierzbicka, 1996). Within the context of Christmas, it becomes a culturally coded signifier of joy, warmth, and tradition, reinforcing the celebratory atmosphere and emotional resonance of the holiday season.

Its use here amplifies the emotional resonance of the ad, encouraging the viewer to associate KFC with the positive feelings evoked by the holiday season. Further enriching the ad's symbolic landscape are non-verbal elements such as the silhouette of Santa Claus riding a sleigh and the stylized Christmas trees flanking the composition. These features align with Barthes' (1972) concept of myth, wherein culturally familiar symbols carry layers of meaning that appear natural or universally accepted. The presence of Santa Claus invokes narratives of generosity, childhood wonder, and seasonal magic myths that advertisers frequently utilize to engage consumers on an emotional level. Through these visual cues, KFC taps into widely recognized cultural stories, allowing its brand message to merge with the broader mythos of Christmas.

The verbal components of the advertisement also contribute significantly to its semiotic construction. The phrase "Have a Finger Lickin' Good Christmas!" serves both as a festive greeting and a reiteration of the brand's signature slogan. Within Saussure's framework, this phrase functions as a linguistic sign that blends brand identity with holiday celebration Saussure (1983:115). The juxtaposition of sensory pleasure "Finger lickin' good" with a cultural festivity "Christmas" creates a persuasive message that elevates the act of eating KFC into a meaningful seasonal ritual. Furthermore, the text appears in bold, capitalized, white font against the red background enhancing its visibility and reinforcing the cheerful tone of the advertisement. As Barthes (1972) suggests, typographical choices are never neutral; they carry connotative meaning that reinforces the intended message. In this context, the use of specific fonts and styles serves to naturalize the advertisement's narrative, embedding it within familiar cultural codes and making the promotional message feel both culturally appropriate and emotionally persuasive to the audience.





**Figure 5.** KFC Christmas Advertisement Featuring an Overflowing Fried Chicken Bucket and Slogan “You Deserve to Have a Good Christmas”.

This paper presents a semiotic analysis of a KFC Christmas-themed advertisement, focusing on the use of visual and textual signs to evoke emotional connections, cultural myths, and brand association. The most immediate visual sign in the advertisement is the overflowing bucket of fried chicken placed prominently in the foreground. According to Saussure’s dyadic model of the sign this image serves as a signifier a visual form that points toward a signified, or the conceptual idea of indulgence, satisfaction, and well-earned pleasure Saussure (1983) The way the food is arranged spilling out of the bucket, highlighted with drawn lines to emphasize excitement suggests abundance and celebration. This aligns with the ad’s main text: “You deserve to have a good Christmas. You’ve earned it.”The linguistic sign reinforces the visual message, combining reward oriented language with sensory rich imagery to position KFC as a suitable, even necessary, part of a satisfying holiday.

The phrase “you’ve earned it” carries particular semiotic weight. It shifts the advertisement from a simple product promotion into a form of emotional validation. Through language, the brand engages in symbolic reward, appealing to the viewer’s sense of personal accomplishment. As Saussure emphasizes, meaning is not inherent in words or images alone, but is derived through cultural associations and collective understanding Saussure (1983). Here, the language constructs a shared notion of deserving joy after effort a culturally resonant message, especially during the reflective season of Christmas.

The Christmas tree featured prominently on the right side of the ad is another key non-verbal symbol. As Barthes (1972: p. 114). The decorated tree is not merely a holiday prop; it evokes tradition, family, nostalgia, and the cultural myth of a magical and joyful Christmas. Its inclusion visually “anchors” the meaning of the message in a widely understood cultural narrative: Christmas as a time of giving, rest, and joy. In this way, KFC’s product becomes seamlessly woven into the larger **mythos of the holiday season**.

Moreover, the red background used in the ad is a color that holds strong emotional and symbolic significance. According to Wierzbicka (1996 p.153) red is a universal prime in many languages that is tied to intense emotions particularly warmth, energy, happiness, and celebration. In the context of this advertisement, red not only grabs attention but creates an emotional backdrop that amplifies feelings of festivity and desire. It heightens the emotional appeal and makes the product feel embedded within the cheerful mood of the holiday.

The use of bold, capitalized white font for the textual slogan increases visibility and imparts a sense of importance. This typographic style communicates confidence and urgency, which, according to Barthes’ theory of connotation helps naturalize the idea that one deserves to enjoy KFC during Christmas Barthes (1972). The hierarchical positioning of the text “YOU DESERVE” being larger than “YOU’VE EARNED IT” also adds persuasive emphasis, guiding the viewer to internalize the message of self-reward.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how KFC’s Christmas themed advertisements use verbal and non-verbal

signs to communicate festive meanings and emotional appeals. Through a detailed semiotic analysis based on Ferdinand de Saussure (1983) theory of signifier and signified, supported by Barthes (1972) cultural myths and Wierzbicka (1996) insights on color symbolism, the research demonstrates how the advertisements function as complex cultural texts rather than mere promotional tools.

The findings reveal that the combination of visual elements such as the fried chicken shaped like a Christmas tree, the dominant red background, reindeer decorations, and symbolic icons like the star and Santa's handworks together with verbal cues like "Merry Christmas" and festive greetings to evoke associations with warmth, joy, family togetherness, and holiday tradition. These signs do not simply represent products but embed them within broader cultural narratives that resonate emotionally with audiences. By analyzing these advertisements as semiotic systems, this study advances the understanding of how advertising messages construct meaning through culturally loaded symbols and language, particularly in seasonal marketing contexts. It highlights the importance of integrating verbal and visual elements to create persuasive messages that engage consumers on both cognitive and emotional levels.

This research contributes to the field by providing a clear example of applying semiotic theory to contemporary marketing materials, illustrating the dynamic interplay between culture, language, and consumer behavior. It underscores how brands like KFC strategically use familiar holiday symbols to deepen brand identification and encourage consumer participation in festive rituals, thus extending the impact of advertising beyond product information to cultural experience and emotional connection. Future research can build on this by examining other cultural contexts or comparing similar advertising strategies across different brands or seasons, thereby enriching the academic discourse on semiotics in commercial communication.

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