



Constructing Masculinity: A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis of Dior Sauvage Advertisement

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the construction of meaning through verbal and non-verbal signs in the *Dior Sauvage* advertisement featuring Johnny Depp. The research is grounded in Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which examines meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The study addresses how linguistic and visual elements within the advertisement construct and reinforce representations of masculinity. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the data were collected from selected scenes focusing on verbal signs, such as brand naming and lexical choices, as well as non-verbal signs, including color, setting, costume, and body language. The findings reveal that the advertisement constructs masculinity through signs associated with strength, mystery, freedom, and independence. At the mythological level, the advertisement reinforces an ideological representation of ideal masculinity as dominant, emotionally restrained, and deeply connected to nature. The study concludes that meaning in advertising is not naturally inherent but socially and culturally produced through interconnected systems of signs that shape audience perceptions and ideological understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

Fragrance advertising presents unique challenges compared to other forms of advertising because scents cannot be directly seen, touched, or fully represented through visual media. Unlike products with tangible and visible characteristics, perfume relies heavily on sensory experiences that cannot be transmitted explicitly to audiences. Consequently, fragrance advertisements depend on the strategic use of verbal and visual signs to help consumers imagine the qualities and sensations associated with a particular scent. In semiotic theory, a sign is understood as a unit of meaning consisting of a signifier (form) and a signified (concept), whose relationship is socially and culturally constructed rather than naturally determined (Saussure et al., 2011). Chandler (2007) further explains that signs operate within systems of meaning shaped by cultural conventions, interpretive practices, and social contexts.

Within linguistic and media analysis, semiotics serves as an essential framework for examining how signs function to construct meaning in advertisements, particularly in representing abstract concepts such as identity, emotion, desire, and sensory experience. This approach has been widely employed in advertising studies because it enables researchers to uncover implicit meanings embedded within visual and linguistic elements (Prasetya, 2025). Semiotics is fundamentally concerned with the study of sign systems in language and communication (Barthes, 1972; Saussure et al., 2011). It investigates how meanings are generated and interpreted through verbal and non-verbal forms of representation. In semiotic analysis, meaning operates at several interconnected levels, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal and explicit meaning of a sign, whereas connotation involves associative meanings influenced by cultural values and emotional interpretations. At a deeper ideological level, myth functions as a system in which connotative meanings become naturalized and reflect broader cultural beliefs, norms, and values (Barthes, 1972).

Previous studies have demonstrated that advertising plays a significant role in shaping cultural ideologies, particularly in relation to gender representation. Pratiwi and Amri (2020) examined the use of signs in female celebrity fragrance advertisements and found that celebrities construct product identity through the strategic use of personal image and symbolic representation. Their findings indicate that verbal and visual signs are deliberately employed to emphasize the intended target consumers of the fragrance, while linguistic choices and imagery reinforce particular ideological messages. Similarly, Jha et al. (2017) revealed that magazine advertisements frequently portray femininity



as passive and sexualized, whereas masculinity is represented through hegemonic traits such as dominance, authority, and control, conveyed through visual signs including posture, gaze, and positioning. Zhang (2019) further argues that luxury perfume advertisements for women utilize symbolic and visual elements to construct meanings associated with femininity, elegance, and sensuality. These studies collectively demonstrate that fragrances are represented symbolically through systems of signs rather than through direct sensory description, thereby highlighting how gendered meanings are socially constructed within advertising discourse.

Several other studies on advertising semiotics have emphasized that the interaction between verbal and visual signs is fundamental to the construction of persuasive messages (Lytvynenko et al., 2022). Existing research, however, tends to prioritize visual analysis or general semiotic interpretation without systematically examining the relationship between linguistic elements and visual signs as an integrated process of meaning-making (Feng & Espindola, 2013). This limitation indicates the need for further research that specifically investigates how verbal and visual components interact to produce ideological meanings in advertising texts. Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes the construction of masculinity through verbal and visual signs in the *Dior Sauvage* advertisement featuring Johnny Depp. The study focuses on how meaning is generated through the interaction of linguistic expressions and visual representations within the advertisement. By applying a Barthesian semiotic framework, this research seeks to reveal how signs operate at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth in constructing masculinity as both naturalized and refined within contemporary advertising discourse.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on the approach proposed by Creswell (2017), which emphasizes the exploration and interpretation of meaning within a particular social and cultural context. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the objective of this study is not to measure variables quantitatively, but to examine how meaning is constructed through systems of signs. The research specifically focuses on analyzing verbal and visual signs in the *Dior Sauvage* advertisement as a multimodal text that represents masculinity. Through this approach, the study seeks to uncover the ideological and cultural meanings embedded within the advertisement. The qualitative framework enables a deeper interpretation of how linguistic and visual elements interact in shaping audience perception.

The object of this study is the *Dior Sauvage* advertisement featuring Johnny Depp, which is examined within the broader context of contemporary advertising and gender representation. The data consist of verbal elements, including brand names and lexical choices, as well as visual elements such as color, setting, facial expressions, costume, and body language. These components are treated as signs that contribute to the construction of meaning within the advertisement. The integration of verbal and visual signs is significant because advertisements communicate messages not only through language but also through symbolic imagery and cultural representation. This multimodal perspective allows the study to analyze how masculinity is represented through interconnected semiotic resources.

Following Creswell's qualitative procedures, the data were collected through systematic observation of the advertisement, selection of relevant scenes, and identification of significant verbal and visual signs (Creswell, 2017). The collected data were subsequently organized and categorized according to their functions as signifiers within the semiotic structure. Data analysis was conducted interpretatively by examining the meanings of signs within their cultural, ideological, and contextual dimensions. This interpretive process enabled the researcher to identify how certain representations of masculinity are produced and reinforced through advertising discourse. The analytical procedure also emphasizes the relationship between textual representation and broader social meaning.

This study applies the semiotic framework developed by Barthes (1972), which conceptualizes meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal and explicit meaning of a sign, while connotation concerns associative meanings shaped by cultural interpretation and emotional response. At the deepest level, myth represents ideological meanings that become naturalized and accepted as cultural truths within society. Each sign identified in the advertisement is analyzed through these three levels in order to reveal how masculinity is constructed symbolically and ideologically. By combining Creswell's qualitative approach with Barthes' semiotic theory, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of masculinity as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon in contemporary advertising discourse.

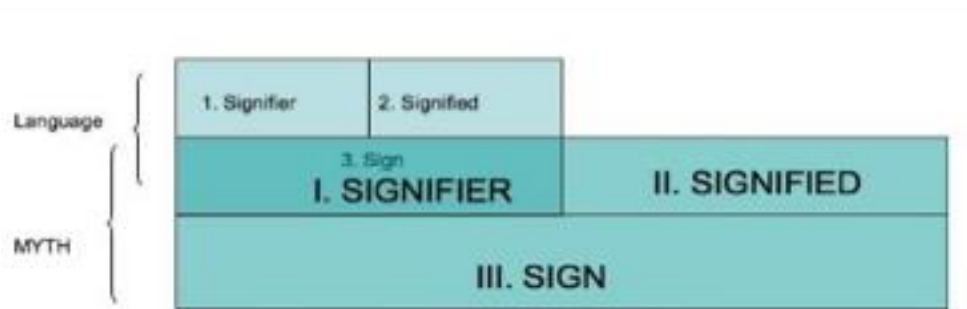


Figure 1. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Model of Denotation, Connotation, and Myth
 Source: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957, trans. Annette Lavers, Vintage: London, 1993), 115.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an integrated analysis of verbal and visual signs in the *Dior Sauvage* advertisement featuring Johnny Depp. The discussion examines how meaning is constructed through a system of signs by applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, particularly at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings are organized into thematic sub-sections to illustrate the process of signification within a multimodal advertising context. Through this analytical framework, the study reveals how linguistic expressions and visual representations interact to construct ideological meanings related to masculinity. The analysis demonstrates that advertising discourse functions not merely as a promotional medium but also as a cultural site for producing symbolic identities.

Verbal Signification of *Dior Sauvage* Advertisement

The Verbal Sign "Dior"

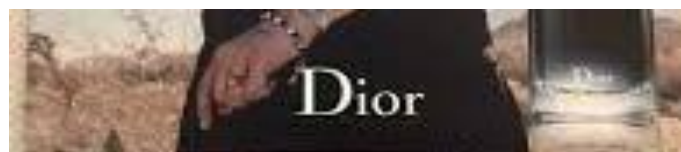


Figure 1. Verbal Sign "Dior"

At the denotative level, the sign "Dior" functions as a brand name that identifies the product and its commercial origin. It refers to a globally recognized luxury fashion house and serves as a marker of authorship and authenticity within the advertisement. At the connotative level, "Dior" evokes meanings associated with luxury, exclusivity, sophistication, and elevated social status. The presence of this sign positions the fragrance beyond its functional purpose and associates it with prestige and refined taste, thereby linking masculinity with cultural sophistication and symbolic capital (Harti, 2019). At the mythological level, "Dior" contributes to an ideological construction in which ideal masculinity is represented as powerful, elegant, and socially distinguished, reinforcing the association between masculinity, authority, and class identity (Marzuki et al., 2023).

The Verbal Sign "Sauvage"



Figure 2. Verbal Sign "Sauvage"

At the denotative level, the word “Sauvage” literally refers to something wild, untamed, or natural. This direct meaning functions as the primary descriptor of the fragrance and immediately establishes the thematic identity of the advertisement. At the connotative level, “Sauvage” signifies freedom, instinct, independence, and raw masculine energy, constructing an image of masculinity that resists social restraint and embraces primal strength. The simplicity of the single lexical item intensifies its symbolic power, making it a dominant marker of masculine identity within the advertisement (Susanto, 2024). At the level of myth, “Sauvage” naturalizes the belief that masculinity is inherently wild and authentic, transforming culturally constructed ideals into qualities that appear universal, essential, and unquestionable.

The Verbal Sign “Wild at Heart”



Figure 3. Verbal Sign “Wild at Heart”

At the denotative level, the phrase “Wild at Heart” refers to an internal emotional or psychological condition, suggesting that wildness exists within an individual’s inner self. Unlike “Sauvage,” which functions primarily as a product label, this phrase directly characterizes the subject represented in the advertisement. At the connotative level, “Wild at Heart” conveys meanings related to authenticity, emotional depth, freedom, and inner individuality. The inclusion of the term “heart” softens the concept of wildness and reframes it as a desirable and positive inner quality rather than a form of chaos or irrationality (Sulistiawan, 2024). At the mythological level, the phrase reinforces the ideological belief that masculinity is innate and essential rather than socially constructed, presenting male identity as authentic, stable, and universally shared.

Visual Representation

The Image of Johnny Depp

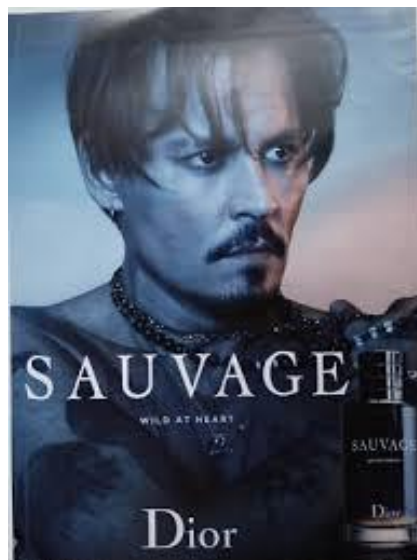


Figure 4. The Image of Johnny Depp

The visual analysis begins with the representation of Johnny Depp as the central figure in the *Dior Sauvage* advertisement. At the denotative level, the advertisement depicts a male figure with a serious facial expression, dressed in dark clothing, and positioned in a composed and solitary stance. His gaze appears controlled, while his body language remains restrained and minimal. At the connotative level, these visual elements signify maturity, confidence, emotional restraint, and self-discipline. Johnny Depp’s public persona further enriches these meanings by evoking associations with individuality, rebellion, artistic identity, and unconventional masculinity, thereby constructing

masculinity as calm, authoritative, and self-contained (Rahmawati, 2024). At the mythological level, the representation reinforces the ideological belief that masculinity is defined by inner strength, independence, and emotional control, naturalizing the notion that a “real man” is self-sufficient and emotionally resilient.

The Image of Fire



Figure 5. The Image of Fire

At the denotative level, fire appears as a prominent visual element within the advertisement, often emerging in the desert environment through flames and burning imagery. The presence of fire functions as a literal representation of heat, light, and combustion within the visual composition. At the connotative level, fire symbolizes energy, passion, intensity, transformation, and raw masculine power. It also conveys danger, unpredictability, and emotional force, reinforcing the concept of wildness associated with the verbal sign “Sauvage” (Hartono et al., 2026). At the mythological level, fire contributes to the ideological construction of masculinity as an elemental and powerful force rooted in primal energy and instinct. The imagery naturalizes the association between masculinity and strength, presenting male identity as both forceful and controlled, where power must be mastered rather than suppressed (Susanto, 2024).

The Image of the Desert as the Background



Figure 6. The Image of Desert Background

At the denotative level, the advertisement is set within a vast desert landscape characterized by open spaces, minimal vegetation, rocky terrain, and earthy color tones. The environment appears expansive, isolated, and untouched by urban civilization. At the connotative level, the desert symbolizes freedom, solitude, authenticity, and a return to nature, while its emptiness emphasizes independence and emotional detachment. The muted and dark visual tones strengthen the atmosphere of mystery, strength, and masculine power. At the mythological level, the desert constructs an ideological meaning in which masculinity is represented as inherently connected to wilderness and the natural world. This representation naturalizes the belief that masculine identity is pure, instinctive, and untouched by social structures, thereby positioning masculinity as an innate rather than culturally constructed condition (Hartono et al., 2026).

The Image of the Wild Animal “Wolf”

Figure 7. The Image of Wild Animal “Wolf”

At the denotative level, the image portrays a wolf with thick fur, pointed ears, sharp facial features, and an alert posture within a natural environment such as a forest, mountainous region, or snowy landscape. The wolf may appear standing, walking, or howling, depending on the scene presented in the advertisement. At the connotative level, the wolf symbolizes strength, danger, wildness, independence, and survival. The concept of the “lone wolf” further reinforces meanings related to solitude, resilience, and self-reliance, while the association with a pack may also evoke loyalty and social bonding. The natural setting, combined with darker visual tones, intensifies the atmosphere of mystery, dominance, and primal power. At the mythological level, the wolf reinforces the ideological belief that masculinity is intrinsically linked to primal instinct, dominance, and natural authority, thereby perpetuating the cultural narrative of the “alpha male” as a natural and unquestionable representation of masculine identity (Tønnessen, 2016).

Interplay of Verbal and Visual Signs

The findings demonstrate that meaning within the *Dior Sauvage* advertisement is constructed through the dynamic interaction between verbal and visual signs. The lexical meaning of “Sauvage,” which signifies wildness and untamed nature, is visually reinforced through the desert landscape and the solitary representation of Johnny Depp, while the connotations associated with “Dior” are reflected in the model’s refined appearance, controlled posture, and sophisticated styling (Firdaus et al., 2025). At the connotative level, this interaction produces a cohesive representation in which wildness and sophistication coexist as complementary rather than contradictory qualities. The verbal and visual elements work together to merge contrasting attributes into a unified construction of masculinity. This alignment strengthens the consistency and ideological clarity of the advertisement’s message.

At the mythological level, the interaction between verbal and visual signs naturalizes a contemporary ideal of masculinity that integrates opposing characteristics into a harmonious identity. Masculinity is represented simultaneously as untamed and cultivated, instinctive yet refined, thereby presenting duality as a desirable masculine norm rather than a contradiction. The interaction of signs plays a crucial role in stabilizing and legitimizing this ideological message within the advertisement (Apta & Wenerda, 2023). Through this process, the advertisement constructs masculinity not as a fragmented identity but as a balanced synthesis of power, elegance, and emotional restraint. The semiotic interplay ultimately transforms culturally constructed meanings into representations that appear natural and universally accepted.

Multimodal Interaction of Signs

The advertisement operates as a multimodal text in which verbal and visual elements function interdependently to produce meaning. At the denotative level, text and image appear simultaneously, connecting the product identity with the visual narrative presented throughout the advertisement. This co-presence establishes a unified communicative structure in which linguistic and visual modes support one another. At the connotative level, multimodal interaction intensifies meaning through processes of reinforcement and expansion. The concept of wildness expressed through the lexical sign “Sauvage” is visually realized through natural landscapes and elemental imagery, while the luxury associated with “Dior” is reflected in the stylized and sophisticated presentation of the model.

Each semiotic mode contributes complementary meanings that deepen the overall interpretation of masculinity represented in the advertisement. At the mythological level, multimodality enables ideological meanings to become naturalized through the repetition and alignment of consistent signs across different communicative modes. This process makes the constructed image of masculinity appear stable, coherent, and self-evident to audiences. The findings demonstrate that meaning does not reside within isolated signs but emerges through the interaction and interdependence of verbal and visual elements within a multimodal system (Harti, 2019). The advertisement therefore illustrates how multimodal signification functions as a powerful mechanism for constructing and legitimizing cultural identities in contemporary advertising discourse.

Myth and Ideological Construction of Masculinity

At the highest level of signification, the advertisement constructs masculinity as a naturalized cultural ideal through the integration of verbal and visual signs. The combination of the lexical signs “Savage” and “Dior,” together with the visual representation of Johnny Depp within a desert setting, produces a coherent image of masculinity that is simultaneously wild, sophisticated, independent, and refined. This construction reflects an ideological process in which masculinity is associated with strength, emotional restraint, self-control, and controlled elegance. The apparent harmony between these traits suggests that such characteristics are inherent aspects of male identity rather than socially constructed representations. Consequently, the advertisement not only depicts masculinity but also contributes to shaping and normalizing its cultural meaning within contemporary society (Susanto, 2024).

From a semiotic perspective, these findings demonstrate how myth operates as a system that transforms cultural values into seemingly natural truths. The advertisement embeds ideological meanings within a network of interconnected signs, causing the constructed representation of masculinity to appear universal, stable, and unquestionable. Through repeated symbolic associations, masculinity is presented as an essential and timeless identity rooted in instinct, power, and refinement. This process highlights the influential role of advertising as a cultural medium that produces, reinforces, and maintains dominant ideologies through multimodal signification (Oktafianto, 2023). The study therefore confirms that advertising discourse extends beyond commercial promotion and functions as a mechanism for shaping social perceptions and cultural norms related to gender identity.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how masculinity is constructed through verbal and visual signs in the Dior Sauvage advertisement featuring Johnny Depp by applying the semiotic framework of Roland Barthes. The findings reveal that meaning is produced through a systematic interaction between linguistic elements, particularly the words “Savage” and “Dior,” and visual elements such as the representation of the model and the desert setting.

At the levels of denotation and connotation, the advertisement constructs masculinity through signs associated with wildness, freedom, luxury, and control. These meanings are further reinforced through the interaction of verbal and visual elements, which create a cohesive and layered representation. At the level of myth, the advertisement naturalizes a cultural ideology in which masculinity is defined by a balance between untamed strength and refined sophistication.

This study demonstrates that meaning in advertising is not inherent but is constructed through multimodal sign systems that operate within specific cultural contexts. By integrating linguistic and visual analysis, the study highlights the importance of a semiotic approach in uncovering how advertisements shape and normalize particular representations of gender. The findings suggest that advertising plays a significant role in reinforcing cultural ideologies of masculinity by presenting them as natural and universally accepted.

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