

The Semiotic Construction of Boycott Narratives against Pro-Israel Products: A Case Study of Instagram Account @bdsarabic

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Abstract

This study investigates the semiotic construction of boycott messages against pro-Israel products on the Instagram account @bdsarabic, situated within the broader discourse of digital activism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As social media platforms increasingly serve as tools of resistance, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement strategically utilizes Instagram to disseminate political messages. This study aims to explore how visual and textual elements work together to construct symbolic meanings that influence public sentiment and mobilization. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research applies Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of semiotics—comprising representamen, object, and interpretant—to analyze three selected campaign visuals targeting Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Carrefour. The findings reveal that Arabic texts function not merely as linguistic signs but also as cultural codes that evoke moral and emotional responses. Meanwhile, modified brand logos act as visual arguments, transforming familiar corporate symbols into representations of violence and injustice. The study concludes that such multimodal constructions serve as rhetorical tools to align everyday consumption with ideological resistance. This research contributes to the understanding of how digital platforms, particularly in Arabic-language activist spaces, function as discursive arenas for contesting hegemony and constructing counter-narratives. The findings also offer insights into the role of semiotics in digital communication and the potential of social media as a catalyst for collective consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains one of the most protracted and emotionally charged geopolitical struggles in modern history. For over seven decades, it has attracted intense international attention, not only because of its political ramifications, but also because of its deep humanitarian, ethical, and cultural implications (Muchsin, 2015; Bar-Tal, 2017). The prolonged tension between Israel and Palestine has generated multidimensional impacts, not only in terms of politics and security but also in social and humanitarian aspects. In Palestinian territories, civilians face various forms of hardship, including restrictions on mobility, limited access to healthcare services, and inadequate education, all of which reinforce the cycles of poverty and structural inequality. Israeli citizens live under constant anxiety due to the recurring threat of armed violence. The complexity of this conflict gives rise to competing narratives, with each side perceiving itself as the victim of injustice. As global awareness increases, so does the emergence of transnational solidarity movements, most notably in the form of boycott campaigns aimed at corporations perceived to support Israeli apartheid and colonialism (BDS, 2024).

Along with the growing global awareness of humanitarian and social justice issues, various forms of transnational solidarity movements have emerged, one of which is boycott campaigns targeting companies perceived to support Israel's practices of apartheid and colonialism (BDS, 2024). The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement has become a strategic medium for individuals and groups across nations to express their disapproval of Israel's political and military policy. In this context, the act of boycott is not merely an economic gesture, but also a

symbol of resistance imbued with moral and ethical significance. Boycotting products associated with support for Israel, including everyday consumer goods, are carried out in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. Through this strategy, activists aimed to exert pressure on the Israeli government to end policies considered discriminatory and harmful to the Palestinian people. Moreover, the BDS campaign fosters critical awareness among global consumers regarding the social and political impacts of their purchasing decisions, and encourages ethical considerations in their patterns of consumption.

In the digital era, platforms such as Instagram have played a critical role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing ideological resistance. Accounts such as @bdsarabic, which currently has over 86,400 followers, actively harness the power of visual media to communicate political messages and shape collective consciousness within Arabic-speaking communities (Kraidy, 2016). This account has become a strategic channel for framing consumption as an ethical act. Despite their reach, the semiotic mechanics behind these visuals remain understudied, particularly in how text and images operate together to construct resistance narratives.

This research is significant because both verbal and non-verbal cues have the potential to constitute scriptable text. The interpretation of signs extends beyond mere recognition of their basic meanings. For instance, the red color featured in the background of an advertisement cannot be simply identified as red without considering its additional implications. According to Barthes' theory of semiotics, this concept corresponds to the notions of connotation and myth. In contrast, Peirce's framework of semiotics elucidates the meaning-making process through a triadic structure encompassing the representamen, object, and interpretant. For example, in a Coca-Cola advertisement, the red color not only describes the hue of the beverage but may also carry a deeper significance when interpreted in conjunction with accompanying text that references genocide. Consequently, an analysis of the advertisement advocating for a boycott of Israeli products necessitates an exploration of its secondary meanings in order to uncover the hidden and substantive implications embedded within it.

Most previous studies on the use of social media in boycott campaigns against products perceived as supporting Israel have been conducted by several researchers using various approaches. One relevant study was conducted by Wulandari and Saepudin, titled "The Boycott Campaign against Pro-Israel Supporting Products Targeting McDonald's Indonesia on the TikTok Account @Calon_syurga8". This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze visual elements, such as color, symbols, and music, as well as their impact on the audience. Another relevant study is Yohana's (2021) work titled "Murals as a Medium for Delivering Social Messages to the Public from the Perspective of Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotics", which discusses murals as a medium to convey social messages. Both these studies focus solely on visual rhetoric without systematically analyzing how language functions as a cultural signifier (Yohana, 2021; Saepudin, 2024).

In addition, Aslama et al. (2025) investigated symbolic misinterpretations of Arabic content on Indonesian platforms using Riffaterre's semiotics. Although they focused on romantic songs, their approach illustrates how Arabic sign systems are often misunderstood, reinforcing the need for culturally sensitive semiotic frameworks. However, there remains a lack of research that examines how such symbolic content is interpreted within ideological and emotional frameworks—especially using Peircean semiotics that integrate form (representamen), reference (object), and meaning (interpretant) (Danesi & Admiranto, 2010; Aini & Zaini, 2023).

Masnani et al. (2024) also show how a simple visual object such as a watermelon can represent political solidarity in the context of Palestine through Peirce's trichotomy of signs: qualisign, sinsign, and legisign. Agussalim and Haeriyyah (2018) demonstrated how Peirce's semiotic model is applied to machine-based translation systems, emphasizing the importance of cognitive processes in forming the interpretant. These two studies reinforce the importance of the semiotic approach, which is not only visual but also cognitive and symbolic, in understanding meaning construction.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing how symbolic meanings are constructed in boycott visuals posted by @bdsarabic by combining Arabic textual cues with brand imagery. Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model, this study investigates how signs are strategically deployed to persuade, mobilize, and shape ethical positions. The visuals analyzed specifically targeted Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Carrefour—three global brands accused of supporting Israeli policies.

This research focuses on three global brands—Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Carrefour—each accused of supporting Israeli policy. These brands have become symbols within the broader narrative of the conflict, representing not only economic interests, but also ethical dilemmas faced by consumers. Visuals targeting these corporations are crafted to resonate emotionally with viewers, often employing powerful imagery and text that evokes feelings of solidarity, resistance, and moral obligation. For instance, a visual might juxtapose the logos of these corporations with poignant images of Palestinian suffering, creating a stark contrast that compels audiences to reflect on their consumption choices. This strategic deployment of signs is not arbitrary; it is a calculated effort to persuade, mobilize, and shape ethical positions within the audience.

The novelty of this study lies in its multimodal approach that integrates Arabic linguistic interpretation with visual semiotics in a politically charged digital context. Unlike prior research that isolates visual and textual components, this study examines how these elements function interdependently to amplify activist messages. By focusing on Arabic digital spaces, this study contributes to the understanding of how meaning is constructed, politicized, and disseminated in online resistance movements. This research aims to thoroughly examine the significance of advertisements that have called for a boycott of Israeli products on the @bdsarabic Instagram account. By analyzing the content, imagery, and messaging of these advertisements, this study seeks to uncover the underlying themes and sentiments driving the boycott movement. Understanding these elements is essential for providing a comprehensive interpretation of the various cultural, political, and emotional meanings conveyed through these advertisements, as well as their impact on consumer behavior and public opinion.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to examine how signs and meanings are constructed in the boycott campaigns posted on the Instagram account @bdsarabic. The study is empirical in nature, grounded in field data collected from publicly available digital artifacts, specifically, visual content shared in Arabic that advocates boycotts of global brands associated with Israeli policies. The type of research is field research in the digital space, with Instagram selected as the platform of analysis because of its visual and symbolic richness. The research approach was qualitative, focusing on interpretation and meaning-making through semiotic analysis.

Data were collected purposively from the @bdsarabic Instagram timeline, with three campaign visuals selected as the primary data. These visuals targeted Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Carrefour and were chosen based on their strong symbolic content, presence of Arabic textual elements, and clarity of visual modification. Data were downloaded in image format, along with their accompanying captions. The time of data collection was May 2025, and all selected visuals were publicly accessible during this period. The analysis employed Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic model, which consists of three core elements: representamen (the sign as it appears), object (the referent), and interpretant (meaning constructed by the viewer).

Each sign was classified using Peirce's typology as follows: qualisign, sinsign, legisign (representamen), icon, index, and symbol (object). In the context of interpretant, there exists a triadic system that comprises three essential components: dicisign, rheme, and argument. The Dicisign serves as a sign that conveys a proposition, representing an assertion or statement that can be evaluated for truth. The rheme refers to the part of the sign that expresses the content or meaning that is being asserted, providing specificity and depth to the interpretation. Lastly, the argument involves the rationale or evidence that supports the Dicisign's claim, facilitating a thorough

examination of the underlying relationships between these elements. This interplay of components is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of meaning-making processes in various contexts. This typology helped trace how meaning was formed through the interaction of textual and visual components within their ideological contexts. To ensure analytical rigor, the findings were validated through theoretical triangulation, comparing interpretations with existing literature on visual rhetoric, digital activism, and media semiotics. Interpretation has also been discussed among researchers to ensure intersubjective agreement and avoid individual bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Aryani & Yuwita, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Coca-Cola Campaign Visual

Figure 1 displays a boycott campaign image shared by the @bdsarabic Instagram account targeting the globally recognized brand Coca-Cola. The image features the company's iconic logo set against a stark-black background, with a reddish-brown liquid dripping below it. Above the logo, an Arabic text reads: “كوكاكولا: تروي عطش جنود الجيش الإسرائيلي الإباضي”, which translates as “Coca-Cola: quenches the thirst of Israel's genocidal army”. The visual combines emotional language with dark tones and symbolic imagery to communicate messages of political resistance and moral urgency.



Figure 1. Coca-Cola Boycott Visual from the @bdsarabic Instagram Account

In Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triadic model, this multimodal image can be deconstructed into key components. The Arabic text functions as a qualisign, a representamen that conveys qualitative moral judgment toward Coca-Cola as an entity involved in violence against the Palestinian people. This qualisign triggers the formation of an interpretant who places Coca-Cola in a highly negative position, suggesting that the company is complicit in Israel's military aggression. The object referred to is not merely a product, but the company's alleged ideological alignment with Israeli military aggression (Aini & Zaini, 2023).

The Coca-Cola logo acts simultaneously as a sinsign (a specific instantiation of a recognizable brand) and as a legitimate sign due to its social and global significance as a symbol of Western corporate power (Elleström, 2022). In everyday consumer culture, this symbol has long been associated with modernity and a positive lifestyle. However, within the activist context presented in this account, the meaning is subverted. A logo, once understood as a representation of

modern and enjoyable living, is redefined as a marker of complicity in global hegemony and a symbol of dominant corporate power that turns a blind eye to oppression (Ramadhan et al., 2022).

The black background strengthens the symbolic tone, functioning both as a qualisign and an icon of mourning, danger, or political gravity (Muslim, 2020). Black is commonly associated with sorrow and tragedy, and in this visual context, it symbolizes grief and reflects the severity of the current political situation. In the context of representation, particularly regarding the qualisign aspect in semiotics, the color black carries significant qualitative meanings associated with feelings of misery, tragedy, and despair. This interpretation emerges only when the color is represented in a concrete form, exemplified by its use as the background in advertisements meant to evoke strong emotional responses. Within the framework of Peirce's semiotics, this tangible representation is referred to as a sinsign. As explored further, the meaning of the color black can advance to the legisign level, where it becomes a symbolic representation agreed upon by members of a linguistic community. This shared understanding occurs when individuals collectively acknowledge that black symbolizes sadness, misery, and tragedy, allowing these meanings to permeate cultural narratives and social contexts.

To delve deeper, we can analyze the object stage of signification, where black emerges as a powerful symbolic sign—its significance tied to broader themes of tragedy and hardship. This layered interpretation finds resonance in the poetry of Arab writers, notably in the work of the Iraqi poet Kamāl al-Dīn. He poignantly illustrates the connection between the color black and themes of sorrow, hunger, and poverty, often evoking a visceral sense of loss and despair in his verses. Such literary references enrich our understanding of how black is not merely a color but a profound symbol deeply embedded in cultural expressions of human suffering.

أعادُهُ في زمنِ الجوع والقهر كي يرتدي قميصاً من العزلة أسودَّ أسودَّ ويموت سريعاً كوميضة نجم

Returning him to a time of famine and violence, he dons the cloak of solitude—black, dark as night—and dies swiftly, like the blinking of a star (Kamāl al-Dīn, 2017).

The poem suggests that, in terms of representational meaning, the sign can be categorized as a legisign, which relates to its function as a conventional or regulatory sign within a language system. In addition, when considering its relationship to the object it signifies, the sign is classified as a symbol. This categorization is based on the shared understanding and agreement among members of the language user community, who collectively ascribe meaning to the sign, thereby allowing it to convey specific concepts effectively.

Beneath the Coca-Cola logo, the reddish-brown liquid—visually resembling both the beverage and blood—serves as an *index* pointing to suffering, death, and the ethical consequences of everyday consumption. This visual ambiguity is not accidental; it is intentionally designed to challenge viewers to confront violence that lurks behind ordinary consumer habits (Muslim, 2020). This aligns with the argument of Khoiruman and Wariati (2023), who emphasize that such ambivalence is deliberately constructed to provoke a deeper emotional response. The interaction between visual elements and text in this representation follows the principles of multimodal communication, where meaning does not arise from isolated elements but is constructed through the interplay and cohesion among these components (Khoiruman & Wariati, 2023).

The strategic use of corporate symbols to convey ideological critique aligns with Elleström's (2022) framework on multimodal communication, which emphasizes that meaning arises not from isolated elements but from the interaction of modes such as image, text, and color. However, the @bdsarabic visual goes further by weaponizing this interaction—the Coca-Cola logo, while still visually intact, is saturated with political meaning through its contextual placement and the accompanying narrative. In contrast to conventional marketing visuals, which depend on coherence and brand alignment, this vision deliberately disrupts visual harmony to provoke discomfort and ethical reflection.

As a form of homage to Arab culture, the use of symbols in this image is structured through the rich application of visual semiotics. Symbolic elements are composed through the interplay of form and color to emphasize a message centered on injustice. For instance, the black background signifies not only mourning, but also resistance to oppression within the historical context of Arab societies. These symbols create a form of visual rhetoric that transforms Coca-Cola from a commercial brand into a concrete representation of broader social issues, including violence and racism, affecting marginalized communities (Ekowidi, 2022).

From Danesi's (2010) perspective on semiotics and cultural codes, image operates on multiple symbolic registers. The soda logo, a signifier of Western modernity and leisure, is recoded within a new ideological framework: consumption becomes complicity. In his critique of digital activism, Muslim (2020) argues that semiotic manipulation in media allows users to construct counter-hegemonic narratives—a process clearly reflected in this case. What sets this analysis apart is the fusion of linguistic assertiveness with visual subversion, placing Arabic as both a cultural and ideological force that resists global narratives.

More than just a medium for promoting boycott campaigns, the image shared by @bdsarabic serves as a visual expression of the complex dynamics of oppression and power in a global context. The use of Arabic as a central element reinforces the connection between local identity and universal discourses on justice and human rights, transforming it into a form of resistance to global injustice (Ramadhani & Sutopo, 2021). This visual representation compels viewers to engage in critical reflection, not only on the targeted product but also on their own position and role within broader global structures (Hermawan & Junaidi, 2025).

The color scheme used in the Coca-Cola visual resonates deeply with symbolic conventions in the Arab cultural context. In Islamic and Arab semiotics, black is often associated with grief, resistance, and sacred mourning, especially in Shi'a iconography and post-colonial literature. Its presence in this visual element not only conveys a serious tone, but also frames the message in a way that may prompt ethical reflection. However, the existing literature offers limited evidence to fully support the claim that such color usage directly fosters moral contemplation (Nwokoro & Akwaowo, 2022).

Additionally, the reddish-brown liquid flowing beneath the logo introduces visual ambiguity by resembling soda and blood, thereby amplifying emotional dissonance and encouraging viewers to confront uncomfortable associations. This technique reflects a broader rhetorical strategy found in Arab aesthetics, where ambiguity (*balāghah*) is deliberately employed to evoke emotional and ethical responses. However, as Prastyanti et al. (2021) note, scholarly support for directly linking this form of ambiguity to classical *balāghah* remains insufficient. Despite this, the image embeds symbolic violence within the visual language of Arab resistance, reinforcing the importance of the cultural context in visual interpretation (Mahaputra & Putra, 2022).

The transformation of a familiar product into a political symbol is inseparable from reframing its conventional meaning. By embedding consumer goods with culturally significant codes, visual elements can evoke ethical reflections and prompt audiences to reconsider their positionality within specific socio-political contexts. This framing process becomes increasingly pronounced in digital spaces, where the speed and reach of visual media amplifies the ideological implications of such consumer products.

A clear example of this practice is the use of Arabic texts and brand iconography in visual campaigns. Generally, analyses of such visuals tend to separate verbal and visual components, potentially overlooking the synergistic effects generated by their combination. However, this analysis proposes a more integrative approach by viewing text and imagery as a cohesive semiotic system. In this context, Arabic text does not merely accompany visual elements, but strengthens their meaning, triggering critical dialogue and fostering a collective resistance identity among viewers who resonate with messages of social justice and political critique.

These semiotic elements construct a powerful visual rhetoric through which familiar products are transformed into politicized signs of injustice. The image functions not only as a medium of

communication, but also as a call for moral reflection and ideological positioning. This construction of meaning aligns with Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of *argu signs*, visual signs that actively encourage interpretation and ethical reasoning on the part of the audience.

The novelty of this analysis lies in its integrated interpretation of Arabic texts and brand iconography as a unified semiotic system. Unlike previous studies that separate verbal and visual analysis, this approach shows how signs converge to frame consumer goods as ideologically loaded, fostering resistance identity through the dynamics of visual and textual semiosis.

To clarify the application of Peirce's framework, the visual signs of this campaign are categorized in the table below.

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Coca-Cola Campaign Visual

Sign Component	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
Arabic Text	Qualisign – morally charged words	Symbol: Israeli army, military oppression	Argument – Call to boycott Coca-Cola for ethical reasons
Coca-Cola Logo	Sinsign, Legisign – globally recognized logo	Icon: Brand identity, economic power	Rheme – Coca-Cola as symbol of complicity and global hegemony
Black Background	Qualisign, Icon – color of mourning	Symbol: Crisis, death, political seriousness	Rheme – Signals urgency and moral gravity
Reddish-Brown Liquid	Qualisign, Index – evokes blood imagery	Symbol: Consequences of occupation, symbolic violence	Argument – Consumption equals complicity in systemic violence

Table 1 illustrates how the visual elements in the Coca-Cola boycott campaign operate as an integrated semiotic system to communicate political stance. The interplay of arabic text, iconic brand logo, dark background, and blood-like liquid evokes a powerful narrative that frames Coca-Cola as complicit in systemic oppression. Using the Charles Sanders Pierce semiotic framework, the analysis uncovers how each sign contributes to a layered construction of meaning, amplifying the ethical call to boycott.

Beyond its critique of Coca-Cola, the image also conveys solidarity with oppressed communications, crafting a visual discourse that invites reflection, empathy, and action. In today's fast-paced digital landscape, the capacity to docode embedded meanings is increasingly vital.

The Coca-Cola boycott visual shared by the @bdsarabic Instagram account exemplifies the strategic use of semiotics in digital political activism. By leveraging globally familiar symbols, the image delivers messages that are both confrontational and contemplating. This multimodal reading reinforces the idea that meaning is not inherent but is produced through the dynamic relationship between visual and textual elements, positioning the image as a potent tool for cultivating collective political consciousness.

The McDonald's Campaign Visual

Figure 2 presents the powerful activist visual targeting of McDonald's corporation. The image transforms the fast-food giant's iconic golden arches into the form of a missile positioned to strike a building in ruins. The red background and graphic blood-like visuals amplified the emotional intensity of the message. Accompanying the image is an Arabic text stating: “لن نتوقف عن مقاطعة ماكдонаلدز”

“لن نتوقف عن مقاطعة ماكдонаلدز”, meaning “We will not stop boycotting McDonald's until it ends its involvement in the system of Israeli colonialism and apartheid completely” This text functions as a strong statement that links the visual to a broader political message. In this context, Arabic is not merely a linguistic choice but also a symbol of identity and solidarity for those affected by these issues.



Figure 2. McDonald's Boycott Visual from the @bdsarabic Instagram Account

This composition has rich symbolic meaning. According to Peirce's semiotic model, the representamen here includes both the altered logo and accompanying text. The modified “M” serves as a *sinsign*, a specific visual transformation meant to provoke an immediate interpretive reaction. The concrete design of the sign symbolizes the *qualisign*, highlighting McDonald's controversial involvement in financing the acquisition of rocket weaponry intended for use in the colonization of Middle Eastern countries, with a particular focus on Palestine. This connection raises significant ethical concerns regarding corporate influence in geopolitical conflicts and the impact on local communities and human rights. It also functions as an *icon* because of its formal similarity to both the original McDonald logo and the shape of a weapon. This visual similarity bridges two seemingly opposing worlds: the friendly realm of consumer culture and violent imagery depicted in the campaign. The object signified is McDonald's corporate presence and its perceived alliance with oppressive political systems, which have become increasingly relevant in today's global context. The interpretant is the viewer's realization that consuming McDonald's products equates to complicity in colonial and violent structures (Aryani and Yuwita 2023). This duality elucidates a significant point in visual rhetoric, where imagery serves not only as a means of persuasion, but also as a tool for mobilizing consumer sentiments against perceived corporate complicity in human rights violations (Greenwood et al., 2018). This makes the visual a strong and provocative statement, urging viewers to reconsider their consumption choice. In an increasingly interconnected world where information spreads rapidly, awareness of the social and political consequences of

individual actions has become increasingly crucial. This image serves as a reminder that every decision, including the choice to consume certain products, has broader implications.

An Arabic statement reinforces this interpretation. As a qualifier, it delivers ideological content embedded in emotionally and politically charged languages. The visual metaphor of destruction, represented by the missile and building ruins, creates an indexical relationship with the themes of war, loss, and injustice. In this context, the missile is not merely a weapon but also a symbol of oppressive power. A red background acts as a qualisign and index, traditionally associated with danger, blood, and moral alarms.

In Arab political visual culture, red is more than just a signal of danger; it is a symbolic color often used to represent sacrifice, urgency, and emotional trauma, particularly in the context of martyrdom and collective struggle against oppression. This visual connotation is entrenched in the shared memories of violence and conflict, where a red background often evokes visceral associations with bloodsheds and calls for immediate action (Moore-Gilbert & Abdul-Nabi, 2021). These associations are not merely aesthetic; they engage in a collective visual memory that shapes political consciousness and responses to ongoing conflicts. In this context, the red background functions as a cultural cue, invoking a sense of alarm within Arab visual memory and deepening the emotional resonance of the visual. The transformation of the iconic golden arches into missiles also draws upon a long-standing visual rhetoric in Arab resistance media, where symbols of power and modernity are often re-coded as threats to local autonomy and justice. This technique mirrors political mural practices across Arab regions where visual metaphors are used to critique imperialism and occupation, further reinforcing how familiar symbols are strategically reimagined to challenge oppressive structures.

Furthermore, this image evokes Peirce's argument sign structure. It does not merely present an aesthetic or symbolic appeal; it urges ethical judgment and political action. The viewer feels that inaction or passive consumption is equivalent to moral surrender. This creates a call to action in which individuals are confronted with the choice to take a stand or remain silent. In the context of contemporary globalization, where major brands often have significant impacts on society and the environment, such visuals serve to raise awareness of individual responsibility in consumption.

This semiotic construction is consistent with Aryani and Yuwita's (2023) insight that global brands can ideologically be subverted by activist media to represent the opposite of their marketed image. However, this visual takes the inversion further by employing violent iconography—the golden arches are not merely criticized but are actively re-imagined as instruments of harm. According to Danesi (2010), this is a classic case of resignification where existing cultural codes are rewritten within new ideological frames.

Elleström's (2022) concept of modal tension is particularly relevant in analyzing the semiotic structure of such visuals. This concept refers to the conflict or friction between different communicative modes, such as image, text, and cultural connotations, which elicit complex interpretive responses from viewers. In the context of anti-consumerist visual campaigns, modal tension arises from the emotional dissonance between the familiar, almost comforting presence of McDonald's brand and its sudden recontextualisation as a symbol of violence. This stark contrast induces cognitive discomfort, compelling audiences to reassess their affective and ideological attachment to the brand. Here, semiotic violence is not incidental or purely provocative; it is a calculated rhetorical maneuver aimed at disrupting normalized consumer behavior and triggering moral reckoning.

The potency of this image lies in its ability to redefine, rather than merely critique, a globally recognized corporate symbol. For decades, golden arches have embodied the values of globalization, Western modernity, and consumer satisfaction, and are visually re-coded as instruments of oppression. This semiotic inversion serves not just as a critique of corporate complicity in geopolitical conflict but also as an active strategy of resistance. It challenges the viewer to confront the ethical dimensions of their consumption habits; to continue patronizing the brand is to tacitly endorse the structures of violence that the reimagined imagery critiques.

This binary—boycott or complicity—is not subtly implied, but made visually explicit, forcing a direct moral confrontation. The viewer is no longer a passive observer but is interpellated as a subject within a broader ideological struggle. As Barthes (1977) suggests, the image operates as a myth, collapsing the distinction between signifier and ideology and naturalizing resistance as the only ethically viable position. Moreover, the symbolic violence embedded within this visual rhetoric resonates with Mahaputra and Putra's (2022) assertion that Arab resistance aesthetics often foreground cultural specificity to mobilize political critique. In this light, golden arches cease to function merely as a corporate logo and instead become active signifiers of geopolitical entanglement.

Thus, the image operates on multiple semiotic levels by invoking both emotional dissonance and ideological clarity. It engages viewers not only visually, but also ethically and politically, positioning them within a dynamic field of resistance discourse. As Elleström (2022) underscores, modal tension is most effective when it unsettles habitual modes of perception where it is leveraged to full effect, transforming a symbol of global consumerism into a weapon of visual protest.

The novelty of this analysis lies in its exploration of symbolic inversion, in which the brand's global appeal is turned against itself. By integrating Arabic text, modified iconography, and emotional color schemes, the activist visually constructs a multi-layered message. This fusion of symbolic and linguistic modes reveals the capacity of digital visuals in Arabic activist spaces to weaponise everyday symbols for ideological resistance.

To provide a clearer representation of this triadic analysis, the components are outlined in table below:

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis of McDonald's Campaign Visual

Sign Component	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
Arabic Text	Qualisign – text invoking colonialism and apartheid	Symbol as Verbal Sign: McDonald's perceived support for Israeli policies	Argument – Boycott as form of resistance against oppression
Modified "M" Logo	Sinsign, Icon – reshaped into missile	Icon and Symbol of violence: Critique of corporate power	Rheme – McDonald's as visual metaphor for destruction
Red Background	Qualisign, Index – color of blood/danger	Symbol: Emotional trauma, urgency for action	Rheme – Alarm and ethical discomfort
Ruined Building Imagery	Legisign, visual of destruction	Icon and Index: Human suffering, consequences of complicity	Argument – Visual appeal for solidarity and collective moral response

Table 2 illustrates how semiotic elements in the McDonalds boycott visual coalesce to form a potent political message through symbolic inversion. The interplay of the altered golden arches, Arabic text, red background, and imagery of destruction functions not only to subvert a global brand but also to reconstruct it as a visual metaphor for violence and complicity in oppression. Using Pierce's triadic semiotic model, each component produces interpretants who generate emotional dissonance and invite ethical reasoning.

This image transcends McDonalds' critique by presenting a discursive challenge to global consumerism, demanding that viewers reassess the moral consequences of their everyday choices. By transforming the symbols of comfort into *icons* of destruction, the visual fosters resistance to identity rooted in collective memory and political trauma. In the digital activist context, this multimodal construction becomes a form of moral provocation, urging both awareness and concrete action

The Carrefour Campaign Visual

Figure 3 shows a boycott campaign targeting Carrefour, a French multinational retail brand. The image includes the Carrefour logo with Arabic text that reads: “أبرمت مجموعة كارفور الفرنسية اتفاقية مع شركة (Electra Consumer Products) (Yenot Bitan) الإسرائيلية وشركتها الفرعية ، وافتتحت 50 فرعاً لخدمة النظام الإسرائيلي، بحضور كل من رئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي نتنياهو ووزير الاقتصاد ”، meaning: “The French Carrefour Group signed an agreement with the Israeli company Electra Consumer Products and its subsidiary Yenot Bitan, and opened 50 branches to serve the Israeli regime, in the presence of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Minister of Economy.”



Figure 3. Carrefour Boycott Visual from the @bdsarabic Instagram Account

The visual system uses a clear combination of text, branding, and digital symbols to convey its political stance. According to Peirce's triadic model, the Carrefour logo functions as a legisign, a socially recognized symbol, and as an icon because of its visual resemblance to the original logo. However, when placed within this activist context, the logo acquires a transformed meaning; the object it refers to is not merely the Carrefour company but its economic collaboration with a political regime framed in the visual as oppressive. This indicates how a brand can become embedded in broader political narratives where business practices are perceived as support for unjust policies.

The Arabic paragraph operates as a representamen in the form of a qualisign, presenting factual information framed in emotionally charged language. The message guides the interpretant toward perceiving Carrefour's expansion into Israel not merely as a commercial move but as an active involvement in supporting colonialist policies. Linguistic framing leads to an interpretation in which Carrefour is no longer viewed as a neutral business entity but as a complicit in apartheid and occupation (Danesi, 2010; Siregar & Wulandari, 2020). In this case, the use of Arabic text serves not only to reach a targeted audience, but also to reinforce a collective identity engaged in resistance against oppression. It creates a sense of solidarity among those marginalized by current policies and legitimizes boycotts as a valid form of resistance. The Carrefour logo transitions from a neutral commercial symbol to a sign of political and moral significance, particularly in the eyes of activists engaged in the boycott movement (Kim et al. 2022; Delistavrou et al. 2020). The integration of the logo within a politically charged narrative enables the development of a new socio-political discourse that not only shapes public perception but also influences consumer

engagement and the potential economic impact on the company through organized boycott behavior.

The image also includes the bold hashtag [#لنقاطع_كارفور](#) ([#Boycott_Carrefour](#)), functioning as both a legisign and symbol. The hashtag in this visual functions as both a *legitimate sign* and symbol, serving as a call to action within the context of digital activism, inviting the audience to align themselves with a broader social movement. Its presence is not merely decorative, but acts as a marker that facilitates collective engagement. The red background intensifies the sense of urgency and moral pressure; semiotically, this color operates as a *qualisign* and an *index* pointing to danger, injustice, or political alarm. In many cultures, red is often associated with warnings or threats; in this context, it amplifies the emotional weight of the message being conveyed. This combination of elements suggests that the boycott is no longer framed merely as a consumer choice, but as an urgent and necessary moral action.

Hashtags in Arabic digital spaces serve a dual role: as social mobilization tools and moral declarations. The phrase "لنقاطع كارفور" is not merely informative—it is imperative in tone, echoing traditional Arabic oratorical forms used in collective resistance, such as rhetorical commands found in the Qur'an or calls to action in poetry. In Arab activist discourse, hashtags are increasingly viewed as a modern form of "resistance chant"—short, repeatable, and mobilizing. This creates a dynamic effect, in which messages can spread quickly and widely, reaching broader audiences and raising awareness of the issues at hand.

Moreover, the color red, used as the background here, reinforces this rhetorical intensity. In Arab semiotic systems, red layered associations with blood, political struggles, and urgency. When paired with an unaltered logo, this contrast communicates an unsettling message: what seems visually harmless may have negative consequences. This creates a visual tension that captures attention and prompts the audience to reflect on the meaning of the image. Through this visual strategy, messages become more profound and emotionally resonant, encouraging individuals to take action.

This type of visual strategy is consistent with the findings of Siregar and Wulandari (2020), who noted digital activism in the Global South, particularly through intertextual visual framing as noted by Crilley et al. (2020). Often relies on a combination of textual narratives, symbols, and platform-native tools (such as hashtags) to construct compelling arguments against multinational corporations perceived as complicit in oppressive geopolitical actions. By emphasizing factual exposition, the Carrefour visual distinguishes itself from typical branding campaigns, which tend to focus primarily on visual modifications. Instead, it draws on discursive authority by providing a substantial narrative context that situates its message within broader ethical considerations (Crilley et al. 2020). Unlike Coca-Cola and McDonald's campaigns, which emphasize visual transformation, the Carrefour visual relies more heavily on discursive strength through the use of extended text, factual content, and the symbolic resonance of the hashtag. This indicates that in the context of activism, visual framing serves not only to attract attention but also to construct a strong and persuasive narrative.

Elleström (2022) reminds us that meaning is not only constructed through visual codes but also through media affordances which serve as critical elements in shaping how messages are perceived (Ayebe & Bonini, 2024). In this regard, Instagram serves as a prime example, enabling activists to not only share static imagery but also foster dynamic interactions through comments, sharing features, and hashtags, thereby amplifying the message's reach and resonance. The boycott image targeting Carrefour operates as a complex semiotic structure, in which the corporate logo becomes a site of secondary signification, carrying a message of resistance embedded within a politically charged visual discourse. Through the process of recontextualization, the protest shifts from a simple act of brand criticism to an ethical call for public engagement, cultivating a moral imperative within consumer behavior (Affun-Adegbulu & Adegbulu, 2020). The blending of static imagery with interactive social elements exemplifies how digital platforms support layered

activism. Danesi (2010) categorizes this phenomenon as a secondary signification, where even logos that remain visually unaltered can take on new interpretants when framed within a politicized context. Within Peirce's semiotic framework, the entire composition functions not merely as a declarative statement, but also as a call to action—one that aims to shift public perception and prompt participatory engagement from its viewers.

In Peirce's terms, the entire image is structured as an argument sign: it does not just state a position but seeks to provoke ethical reasoning and public reaction. The integration of corporate logos, linguistic narratives, and activist symbols redefines the act of consumption as a political choice, urging digital audiences to participate in the boycott not just ideologically but performatively through sharing and tagging. It creates a space in which each individual can feel involved and contributes to broader social change.

The novelty of this analysis lies in the articulation of intertextual activism, in which visual branding, political narrative, and digital hashtags operate as a unified semiotic system. Unlike traditional protest visuals, the Carrefour image demonstrates how Arabic activist media embeds factual expositions within emotional framing and strategic symbolism. The image blurs the line between information and mobilization and between branding and resistance.

The key components are outlined in the table below to highlight how these meanings are semiotically constructed.

Table 3. Semiotic Analysis of Carrefour Campaign Visual

Sign Component	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
Arabic Paragraph Text	Qualisign – formal narrative	Symbol as Verbal Sign: Carrefour's economic alliance with Israeli firms	Argument – Carrefour as morally and politically complicit
Hashtag #Boycott_Carrefour	Legisign, Symbol – social media call to action	Symbol as Verbal Sign: Collective resistance movement	Argument – Mobilization through digital solidarity
Carrefour Logo	Icon, Legisign – unaltered brand symbol	Icon: Global retail capitalism and its entanglements	Rheme – Brand reframed as instrument of political/economic hegemony
Red Background	Qualisign, Index – visual cue of alarm	Symbol: Urgency, injustice, symbolic violence	Rheme – Moral tension and invitation to action

Table 3 demonstrates how the Carrefour boycott campaign visual uses narrative exposition, symbolic framing, and digital affordances to articulate political resistance. The combination of formal Arabic text, an unaltered yet ideologically reframed logo, a red background, and an activist hashtag operates as an integrated semiotics system. Within Peirce's framework, these signs function collaboratively to generate a compelling argument regarding corporate complicity and collective responsibility. Unlike the visual transformation strategy in Coca-Cola and McDonald's visuals, Carrefour's image relies heavily on textual anchoring and the socio-political context to mobilize action. This visual emphasizes that meaning is not solely in aesthetic disruption, but also in discursive framing. By invoking shared cultural codes and inviting participatory engagement through hashtags, the image affirms that activism today extends beyond protests—it becomes an act of reinterpretation and reclamation of meaning through digital media.

Building on the review above, the author concludes that this article serves as a valuable illustration of the practical application of Peirce's semiotic theory in analyzing social media. It specifically examines both verbal and non-verbal signs found on popular platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, as well as other social media channels. Through a thorough analysis of these signs, the article uncovers a deeper understanding of the meanings behind various media

advertisements, persuasive appeals, and prohibitions that are disseminated and shared in these digital environments.

This analysis is particularly important, as it underscores the need for clear and impactful communication in our increasingly homo symbolic society, where both classical and modern communities depend on effective media for message conveyance. To successfully navigate and interpret the intricate landscape of digital advertising, individuals must cultivate the ability to decode each sign element present in the media. Therefore, this article aims to provide an insightful and detailed perspective on how Peirce's semiotics can elucidate the meanings embedded in sign messages on social media platforms, enhancing our understanding of their role in contemporary communication.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed how the boycott campaign visual on the @bdsarabic Instagram account constructs meaning through multimodal signs, applying Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic framework. Across campaigns targeting Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Carrefour, the research revealed a consistent strategy of semiotic inversion, where corporate logos are transformed into signs of violence, complicity, and colonial alignment. These visuals operate not merely as representations but also as argument signs, urging viewers to engage in moral reasoning and collective resistance. Through Peirce's lens, each visual element—text, color, logo, and symbol—functions not in isolation, but as a constellation of signs producing political and emotional effects. The Arabic language plays a critical role not only as a linguistic code but also as a cultural and ideological force; its moral tone and rhetorical power anchor each image within Arab activist discourse. Meanwhile, color choices—particularly black and red—serve as qualisigns deeply embedded in Arab semiotic traditions and are associated with grief, struggle, sacrifice, and urgency. Meanwhile, color choices—particularly black and red—serve as qualisigns deeply embedded in Arab semiotic traditions and are associated with grief, struggle, sacrifice, and urgency. The adaptation of familiar brand elements into ideologically charged visuals demonstrates how meaning is recontextualized to reflect moral urgency and political resistance. This study extends prior scholarship by Elleström, who emphasized the communicative power of multimodal interaction, by showing how activist visuals go beyond representation into discursive confrontation. Danesi's notion of secondary signification is particularly relevant here, as familiar signs, such as logos, are recontextualized into ideological artifacts. Muslims critique of visual activism further highlights how images in digital spaces become vehicles for counterhegemonic narratives, especially when infused with culturally specific symbols and slogans. From the perspective of Arab semiotics, these visuals reflect the broader tradition of using iconography as resistance, including the recoding of logos into weapons, the use of red as a call to alarm, and the deployment of hashtags as modern-day rhetorical imperatives. Rather than adopting Western forms of persuasion, these visuals adopt digital tools to express indigenous ideological positions rooted in historical trauma and communal ethics. The novelty of this study lies in showing how language and image converge to construct persuasive resistance messages rooted in global branding systems and local cultural frameworks. Ultimately, this study shows that meaning is never neutral; it is contested, constructed, and disseminated through signs that carry cultural memory and political intention. Through multimodal strategies involving language, color, symbols, and brand iconography, activist visuals on @bdsarabic do not merely represent resistance; they perform it. In the context of digital activism, particularly within Arabic-speaking communities, such visuals become battlegrounds where corporate identity, public morality, and cultural heritage intersect in highly politicized ways. These findings not only contribute to the growing body of research on semiotics and digital resistance but also demonstrate the power of visual media to reframe everyday symbols into tools of ideological confrontation. By grounding meaning in culturally embedded codes, these visuals offer insights into how digital platforms are reshaped into spaces of rhetorical struggle and ethical engagement.

This research opens valuable avenues for future inquiry, especially regarding how different linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical communities construct symbolic resistance using platform native strategies and semiotic adaptation. As global solidarity movements continue to evolve, understanding the visual grammar of protests in localized digital cultures has become increasingly vital for both academic and activist discourse. This article examines the application of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory to the interpretation of posters on digital social media, rather than advancing the theory itself. Consequently, a grounded theory analysis is essential to extract various semiotic theories and formulate an effective and scientifically justified framework for analyzing digital media disseminated via social media platforms.

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