

EXPLORING VISUAL SEMIOTICS IN MYKONOS MILK DROPS SERIES PERFUME PACKAGING THROUGH PIERCE'S THEORY OF NON-VERBAL SIGNS

MENGEKSPLORASI SEMIOTIKA VISUAL DALAM KEMASAN PARFUM SERI MILK DROPS MYKONOS MELALUI TEORI TANDA NON-VERBAL PIERCE

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the visual semiotics of Mykonos' Milk Drops series, a collection of unisex fragrances that challenge traditional gender norms in the perfume industry. The study investigates how the packaging of these fragrances communicates the essence of the scents within, focusing on the signs and symbols employed to convey meaning and evoke consumer interest. This qualitative research employs purposive sampling to focus on three specific variants of Mykonos' Milk Drops series: Milk Drops, Pink Drops, and Café Drops. The study applies Peirce's triadic semiotic theory to examine the non-verbal signs found on the packaging, classifying them as Qualisigns, Sinsigns, Icons, Indexes, Rheme and Dicents. This research offers valuable insights into the role of visual semiotics in the fragrance industry, particularly regarding perfumes. By demonstrating how packaging can encapsulate complex ideas and emotions through visual language, the study emphasizes the significance of design in marketing strategies and its potential impact on consumer behavior. The findings reveals how non-verbal signs communicate the product's essence. The packaging initially presents as a Qualisign (color), followed by various Sinsigns (cow images, box shape, cowhide patterns, water droplets). These function as Icons (representing cows and milk cartons) and Indexes (cowhide), with water droplets further suggesting the freshness and scent of milk.

Keywords: *visual semiotic, Pierce's theory, Mykonos, packaging*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi semiotika visual pada kemasan parfum seri Mykonos Milk Drops, sebuah koleksi parfum. Studi ini melihat bagaimana kemasan parfum ini mengomunikasikan esensi aroma yang terkandung di dalamnya, dengan fokus pada tanda dan simbol yang digunakan untuk menyampaikan makna dan membangkitkan minat konsumen. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan purposive sampling untuk menyoroti tiga varian spesifik dari seri Mykonos Milk Drops: Milk Drops, Pink Drops, dan Café Drops. Studi ini menerapkan teori semiotika Peirce untuk mengkaji tanda-tanda non-verbal yang ditemukan pada kemasan, mengklasifikasikannya sebagai Qualisign, Sinsign, Icon, Indeks, Rheme, dan Dicent. Penelitian ini melihat lebih dalam tentang peran semiotika visual dalam industri parfum. Dengan menunjukkan bagaimana kemasan dapat merangkum ide dan emosi yang kompleks melalui bahasa visual, studi ini menekankan pentingnya desain dalam

strategi pemasaran dan potensi dampaknya terhadap perilaku konsumen. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bagaimana tanda-tanda non-verbal mengkomunikasikan esensi produk. Kemasannya awalnya hadir sebagai Qualisign (warna), diikuti oleh berbagai Sinsign (gambar sapi, bentuk kotak susu, pola kulit sapi, tetesan air). Ini berfungsi sebagai Ikon (merepresentasikan sapi dan kotak susu) dan Indeks (pola kulit sapi), dengan tetesan air yang menggambarkan kesegaran dan aroma susu.

Kata kunci: semiotika visual, teori Pierce, Mykonos, kemasan

Introduction

Semiotics refers to signs that aims at providing answers to such questions as: what “A” means; where “A” can be anything from a gesture, single word, to a whole thing (Ugwu & Chukwu, 2023). Thus, semiotics allows for a deeper understanding of signs. For example, while white might generally be seen as just a color palette, a deeper understanding reveals it can be associated with cleanliness, clarity, purity, and so on (Braam, 2025). Exploring semiotic perspectives, we may come to realize that information or meaning is not “contained” in the world or in books, computers or audio-visual media. Meaning is not “transmitted” to us- we actively create it according to a complex interplay of codes or connections of which we are normally unaware (Ugwu & Chukwu, 2023). Becoming aware of such codes is both inherently fascinating and intellectually empowering (Chandler, 2007 in Ugwu & Chukwu, 2023). Furthermore, semiotics has a sub-branch called visual semiotics. Visual semiotics describes how visual images communicate a message and

also explains the meaning of text and images in one frame (Pratiwi, Muchtar, & Perangin-Angin, 2022). Visual semiotics, as explained by Ferdinand de Saussure (Piliang, 2003 in Pratiwi et al., 2022) is a field that explores signs within the context of social life. The key difference between general semiotics and visual semiotics is that the general semiotic investigates signs and symbols broadly, while the visual semiotic concentrates on visible signs and symbols, recognizing that their meanings are not predetermined but created actively (Pratiwi et al., 2022).

Essentially, product packaging acts like visual signs because the images and text on it do not have the written meaning. Instead, consumers actively interpret them based on their own understanding from what they see on the product packaging. As cited in (Ugwu & Chukwu, 2023) that product packaging is functioned to either safeguard the product against damage or to direct the user on standard handling practices. Furthermore, they highlighted that the symbols on the product packaging relate to society. This demonstrates the significant role product

packaging plays, serving both practical and subtle functions to capture consumer interest.

One product that particularly caught the researcher's attention in this study was perfume and its packaging. As cited in (Tran, 2021) is a significant hurdle for fine fragrance companies to communicate the value of a scent blend, especially since the experience is highly subjective and all branding and promotional efforts must be visual. Perfume and its packaging are the interesting area for research, such as the semiotic analysis of fragrance branding, particularly in the case of Jean Paul Gaultier's "Le Male," illustrates how visual elements can target specific demographics, such as gay male audiences, through strategic imagery and iconography (Tran, 2021). Another research also appears on (Nikiforova, Popivniak, & Galitska, 2023) which stated perfume packaging uses visual elements such as color, shape, and design to make products stand out. These elements communicate qualities like attractiveness

and individuality, ultimately boosting the perfume's appeal and its ability to sell. Furthermore, (Silva & Mazzilli, 2014) said visual semiotics in perfume packaging, particularly color usage, influences consumer perception of scents. They highlight the socio-cultural factors that shape these associations, emphasizing the importance of effective communication through design to evoke specific fragrance attributes.

In this research, we are particularly interested in exploring an Indonesian perfume brand called Mykonos, largely due to various research available on perfumes and their packaging. Although, Mykonos offers several fragrances, their Milk Drops Edition is what especially captured our attention. This collection includes three variants: Milk Drops, Pink Drops, and and Café Drops (Mykonos, 2024a). The packaging of Mykonos Milk Drops edition have interesting signs which captures the research interest, as can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Mykonos Milk Drops Series

As seen in Figure 1, the unique packaging of Mykonos Milk Drops series immediately caught the researchers' interest. The design features several signs such as boxes that resemble milk cartons, the image of a cow, and a dripping liquid font, all contributing to a highly realistic depiction of the milk aroma in every variant. Moreover, Mykonos Instagram page provides details on their Milk Drops series. For the "Milk Drops" variant, they say "The very first pure milk perfume in the market, with a twist of white musk and green notes" (Mykonos, 2024a). Meanwhile, for the Pink Drops variant, they describe it as "Taking you back to childhood, Pink Drops brings back the comforting scents of strawberry, milk, and caramel for a taste of pure nostalgia." (Mykonos, 2024c). On the other hand, for the Café Drop variant, they visualize its aroma by stating "This velvety smooth blend of milk, vanilla, and a hint of

tiramisu whispers of coffee for a sophisticated escape, savoring the moment with every spray." (Mykonos, 2024b).

The visual signs and the scent description from Mykonos Instagram page, piqued the researcher's curiosity. Thus, this research aims to investigate how the packaging of these Mykonos Milk Drops edition communicates the essence of the scents within. We focus on the signs and symbols employed to convey meaning and evoke consumer interest. To see deeper through the signs which appear on Mykonos Milk Drops edition packaging, the researches choose the semiotic approach by Charles Sanders Peirce. This approach allows for an interpretation of the meaning embedded in the visuals a brand creates through its product packaging. Peirce triadic semiotic theory consists of the representamen, object, and interpretant, as shown in Figure 2.

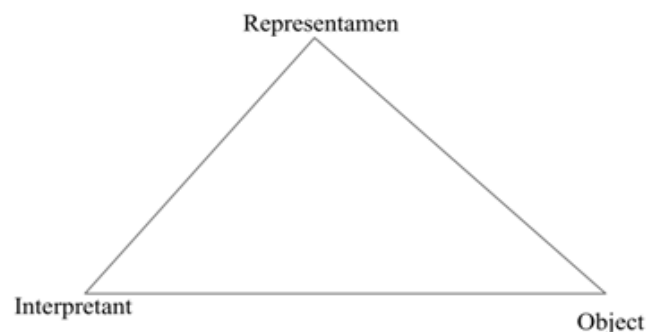


Figure 2. Peirce Triadic Semiotic

In Peirce's semiotic approach, there are three aspects: representamen, object, and interpretant (Peirce, 1931 in Wiyogo & Kumala, 2023). Furthermore, (Peirce, 1931 in Wiyogo & Kumala, 2023) also explains that the representamen is divided into three types: qualisign, sinsign, and legisign. Meanwhile, the object consists of three: icon, index, and symbol. Lastly, the interpretant is also divided into three: rheme, dicent, and argument (Table 1).

Table 1. Peirce's Semiotic Theory

No	Peirce's Triadic Semiotic	Signs
1	Representamen	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Qualisign is a quality that exists in the sign; it only becomes a sign once it takes a tangible form. For example, people associate the color white with being clean or holy, and black with being dirty, dark, and gloomy. 2. An actual event that acts as a sign is called a sinsign. For example, a person running with a terrified expression signals they are in danger and must get away. Another example is a baby's cry, which means the baby is hungry. 3. A Legisign refers to a rule or convention embodied within a sign. These laws are typically well-established and widely accepted, like the meanings of traffic lights. For instance, a nod signifies affirmation or "yes," while a head shake indicates rejection or "no."
2	Object	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An Icon is a sign that represents its object simply through its own inherent characteristics, regardless of whether the object truly exists. For instance, a picture of President Soekarno is an icon of President Soekarno. 2. An Index is a sign that has a physical connection to what it represents and points to its meaning, even though it's not directly the signified thing itself. For instance, smoke is an index of fire. 3. A Symbol is a sign that represents an object because of an established rule, often a shared understanding of ideas, which leads us to interpret the symbol as referring to the object. Traffic lights and national flags are the examples.
3	Interpretant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Rheme is a sign that is understood to depict its object based purely on its characteristics; for example, a red nose suggests someone is either catch a cold or has been crying. 2. A Dicent conveys information about the interpretant. For example, a sign on a city road stating it is dangerous due to the high number of accidents there. 3. An argument represents the logical reasoning derived from an interpretant. For example, a "no smoking" sign at a gas station is an argument, indicating that the location is highly flammable.

Peirce's triadic semiotic theory was chosen for this research because it can explain the visual signs found on the product packaging of Mykonos's Milk Drops, Pink Drops, and Café Drops perfumes. Furthermore, Peirce's semiotics can help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the signs on the product packaging and the aroma of Mykonos' Milk Drops series.

Method

This research uses qualitative method. Qualitative research which is not based on numerical analysis or scientific procedures such as experiments, but is based on individual observation and critical analysis (Davies & Mosdell, 2006). We chose a qualitative research method because it allowed us to fully explore the subject. Using (Davies & Mosdell, 2006) framework, we provided a detailed understanding of what we conducted. This approach highlighted the importance of participants' perspectives, making our results more insightful and contributing to the field's knowledge.

In this research, the researchers use purposive sampling in choosing the data. Purposive sampling means you choose the objects for a reason, like picking only TV soap opera viewers or only students who drink

(Davies & Mosdell, 2006). Furthermore, Davies and Mosdell stated when you are just looking at these specific groups, you can still get reliable information from them. The main thing is do not assume your findings apply to everyone. The researchers used purposive sampling because the Mykonos Milk Drops series is the first lactonic perfume launched by an Indonesian local perfume brand. It is successful in the Indonesian local perfume market, selling out in its first release (Mykonos, 2024a). Furthermore, in terms of product packaging, the Mykonos Milk Drops series also has unique packaging, especially the signs found on its container. This made the researchers interested in selecting three variants of Mykonos that belong to the Milk Drops series: Milk Drops, Pink Drops, and Café Drops.

After deciding on the perfume variants, the researchers then looked at them more closely using visual semiotics. This basically means studying signs and symbols. The researchers only focused on non-verbal signs. We used Peirce's triadic semiotic theory, which breaks things down into three parts: the representamen which refers to the sign itself, the object which refers to what the sign stands for, and the interpretant which refers to what we understand from the sign. This specific

theory was chosen because it was good at helping to figure out the meanings hidden in the product packaging and it sees how the packaging relates to the scent that Mykonos wants to deliver.

Result and Discussion

The researchers sourced images of every Mykonos Milk Drops variant directly from the official Mykonos Instagram page. Mykonos Milk Drops identified as Milk Drops, Pink Drops, and Café Drops. Each variant is characterized by uniform packaging, symbols, and design elements, with the primary distinction being the color. Mykonos employs color differentiation to signify the scent profiles and olfactory notes associated with each perfume variant. The focus of the researchers' analysis is exclusively on non-verbal data, emphasizing the visual representation employed by Mykonos in conveying the essence of its products.






The non-verbal sign observed consist of the packaging's color, the shape of the packaging box, illustrations of cows, cowhide patterns, and water droplet shapes. The data of the image that the researchers obtain can be presented on Table 2.

Based on drawing inspiration from previous research in the field, this study

distinctly positions itself by focusing exclusively on the visual semiotic analysis of the non-verbal signs present on the packaging of Mykonos, an Indonesian local perfume brand. Unlike previous research, this research intentionally omits discussions regarding consumer gender and scent perception, concentrating solely on the communicative power of the packaging design itself.

This discussion examines the non-verbal sign used on the Milk Drops series packaging, using Charles S. Peirce's theory of signs as a guide. The researchers found that the packaging's overall appearance, or Representamen, first registers as a Qualisign. The most obvious example of this is the color of each packaging. Moving beyond this initial impression, we see several Sinsigns, which are the actual, specific elements present on the packaging. These include the pictures of cows, the unique shape of the box, the cowhide patterns, and the water droplet designs. These visual elements then point to their Objects (what they represent) in two main ways: as Icons and Indexes. For example, the cow image acts as an Icon because it directly looks like a cow, referring to milk. The box shape is also iconic as it mimics a milk carton.

Table 2. The non-verbal sign in Mykonos Milk Drops Series

Object	Sign	Interpretant
	Packaging's Colors: Blue, brown and pink	To illustrate the three different variants of Milk Drops series to the audience To enhance the sensory experience
	Water droplet shapes	Milk Drops series represent liquid texture, so the water droplets sign indicates liquid or creamy texture
	Water droplet shapes	Milk Drops series represent liquid texture, so the water droplets sign indicates liquid or creamy texture.
	Illustration of cow	The most obvious message is that the milk comes from a cow
	Cowhide patterns	The cowhide pattern is an undeniable visual link to the animal that produces milk.

The cowhide pattern serves as an Index, pointing directly to the cow that produces milk, due to its physical association. Lastly, the water droplets on the lettering visually suggest the texture or freshness of milk, further enhancing the product's identity and its intended scent."

The color of the packaging is an example of a Qualisign. This term refers to a

basic sensory experience or quality that serves as a sign. A Qualisign falls under Peirce's concept of Firstness, which represents potential signs that cannot exist on their own. They need to be manifested in some form to become actual signs. The Milk Drops series features three distinct colors: blue for Milk Drops, pink for Pink Drops, and brown for Café Drops. The use of blue in

dairy products is not uncommon; various countries have established color coding systems for milk packaging. The blue hue is particularly prevalent, often indicating milk with a fat content of 2-3%, which is typically packaged in blue or yellow containers. Thus, the choice of blue for the original Milk Drops variant clearly mimics traditional dairy products. The specific shade of blue employed, known as Baby Blue, (Braum, 2025), is a pale, soft hue that evokes feelings of calmness, innocence, and serenity. This color not only aligns with the established conventions of dairy branding but also enhances the emotional appeal of the product, suggesting purity and freshness.

Slightly different to the original Milk Drops variant, the Pink Drops variant presents a strawberry milk fragrance. The pink hue of the Pink Drops variant signifies a strawberry milk aroma. As widely recognized, pink and red indicate a strong correlation with strawberries, a connection rooted in the fruit's natural color. Due to this natural coloration, humans have a strong learned association between the taste of strawberry and the colors red and pink. Pink is a diluted or softened version of red. Pink often inherits a "softer" version of red's meanings. This is logically consistent, as the vibrant red of

strawberry, when combined with the white of milk, naturally creates a pink shade. Mykonos explicitly states that the Pink Drops aroma is designed to evoke childhood memories, transporting individuals to a comfortable, joyful, and nostalgic state. While numerous variations of pink exist, the particular shade employed in Pink Drops is distinctly a light, soft pink. This specific light pink is frequently associated with love, romance, and innocence. It functions as a color embodying tenderness and compassion, making it a prevalent choice in contexts such as baby clothing and nursery décor, and in fashion, it is often utilized to cultivate a feminine and romantic aesthetic (Maglaty, 2025).

The third variant, Café Drops, is a fragrance that represents the aromas of tiramisu and milk coffee. Mykonos describes Café Drops as "like a perfect cup of tiramisu; it is both sweet and sophisticated, playful and undeniably classy." The choice of the color brown for the Café Drops packaging directly signifies its coffee-related scent profile, directly reflecting the natural appearance of roasted coffee beans and brewed coffee. As roasted coffee beans develop various shades of brown, this color is an incorporated part of coffee itself. This specific hue can convey nuanced meanings,

for example lighter browns may suggest a milder roast, or a coffee infused with milk, such as a latte or cappuccino. Consistent with this, the light brown chosen for this variant effectively communicates its milk coffee aroma. Thus, Café Drops not only engages the olfactory senses but also employs color symbolism to enhance its thematic representation of coffee culture. According to Color Psychology, the light brown hue in Café Drops categorized as nude color. Nude is a versatile and essential color in design, fashion, and art, offering a range of possibilities from creating warm, inviting spaces to elegant, understated styles. Its ability to blend seamlessly with both soft and bold colors, as well as its association with nature and authenticity. (Braam, 2025)

According to Peirce, the representation of the cow on the packaging functions as a Sinsign, its meaning deeply established through cultural and commercial conventions associated with dairy products. Cows are naturally connected to milk, widely recognized as mammals that produce this pure material. In addition, for a long time human also harvesting their milk for human. The image of a cow is universally recognized as the primary source of milk around the globe; therefore, it appears widely on milk cartons and in branding for dairy items. That

being in the case, the image of a cow on the Milk Drops packaging symbolically indicates that the perfume's fragrance is closely related to milk.

Beyond just showing a picture of a cow, the cowhide pattern on the packaging is a very strong visual clue. This pattern immediately makes us think of cows, especially since the most common milk-producing cows often have these distinct spotted coats. This direct visual link between the spotted pattern and milk-giving cows helps to strongly connect the product to where milk comes from, even without a full drawing of the animal.

The unique perfume packaging for the Milk Drops series looks like a milk carton and even has water droplet designs on its letters. These design choices add more symbolic meaning to the packaging. This specific design really helps to show that the perfume smells like milk (a "lactonic" scent). When people see it, they're meant to immediately think of the rich, creamy, and savory smell of milk. This connection is important because "milk perfumes" – or more properly called lactonic perfumes – are a special type in the fragrance world. They are known for their creamy, milky, and slightly sweet smells. So, the packaging works as a strong visual message, directly matching the rich, sensory

experience the perfume inside promises (Scent Journer, 2025)

When we look at how Qualisigns as in colors and Sinsigns as in pictures work in the explained discussion. As mentioned before, Qualisigns, such as the color of a bottle or the presence of water droplets, require a degree of active interpretation. This shows that these signs are abstract. Their meanings aren't obvious right away but become clear when we think about them. This kind of interpretation, is called a Rheme in Peirce's theory. This means their meaning can change depending on who is looking at them and their situation. On the other hand, Sinsigns, such as a milk carton's shape, a picture of a cow, or cowhide patterns, point directly to what they represent. These signs are very clear, so we don't need to interpret them deeply; they're like straightforward statements, which Peirce calls Dicents.

Conclusion

This study has clearly shown how the non-verbal signs on the Milk Drops series packaging work together, using Charles S. Peirce's sign theory to understand them. By classifying parts of the packaging as Qualisigns, Sinsigns, Icons, Indexes, Rheme and Dicents, we've seen how these signs send messages and create feelings. The

colors chosen for each variant, baby blue for Milk Drops, light pink for Pink Drops, and light brown for Café Drops, serve not only as aesthetic decisions. They are smart marketing choices that use familiar cultural connections to dairy and sweet flavors.

The pictures of cows, cowhide patterns, the milk carton shape, and the water droplet designs all work together to strengthen what the product is about and what it promises to smell like. These visual hints build a consistent story that links the product to ideas of sweetness, childhood memories, and comfort, making it more appealing.

In short, the Milk Drops series packaging is a great example of how good design uses semiotic principles to communicate complicated ideas simply. This analysis highlights how important it is to understand visual language in marketing and product design, showing that packaging can truly influence how consumers see and act, all through carefully chosen signs.

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