

# Semiotic Analysis of Five Famous Streetwear Trademarks

Jauhar Helmie, Ery Lutfi Syafrudin

Universitas Suryakencana

Cianjur, Indonesia

jauharhelimie@unsur.ac.id

**Abstract**—Trademark is an identity of any company. Each trademark contains meaning which can be revealed semiotically from its signs. This research were aimed to find out the semiotic signification process on five famous streetwear trademarks consist of *Supreme*, *Gucci*, *Bape*, *Off-White*, and *Champion*, to investigate the meaning of the icon and symbol in those streetwear trademarks, and to observe the aspect that one of the other trademarks more dominant. This research used qualitative research design. The data of this research were five famous streetwear trademark consist of *Supreme*, *Gucci*, *Bape*, *Off-White*, and *Champion*, also some comments of respondents that have been gathered by the writer by using open-ended questionnaire. The participant were Instagram users. The time duration of gathering respondents' comments was one week. From the questionnaire, the writer found 127 respondents with their comments in one week through the open-ended questionnaire. In the research findings, the writer found that each of trademarks have signifier and signified with denotative and connotative meaning. The writer also found 5 icons and 5 symbols in 5 famous streetwear trademark consist of *Supreme*, *Gucci*, *Bape*, *Off-White*, and *Champion* which deliver some messages to their consumers. The result from open-ended questionnaire, the writer found that *Off-White* was dominantly chosen by the respondents. The writer also found that most of respondents chose their favorite brand based on the brand design. In conclusion, there is a significant effect between the design of the trademark/brand and the consumer interest.

**Keywords**—*semiotic; trademark; meaning*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The fame of the brand is one of the reasons that the people struggle to buy besides of its design. For example, there are two t-shirts with the same design, same color, same material, but different name, and people will spend their money to one of them that more famous than others. Promotion is also the key. The brands endorse some well-known public figures to get their fame. The brand of a streetwear should have any trademark to distinguish their brand from the other brand. Trademark is a recognizable sign, design, or expression which identifies products or services of a particular source from those of others, although trademarks used to identify services are usually called service marks. The trademark owner can be an individual, business organization, or any legal entity. A trademark may be located on a package, a label, a voucher, or

on the product itself. For the sake of corporate identity, trademarks are often displayed on company buildings.

Afterward, the streetwear and the trademark in the consumer society altered to the any problem of social and cultural landscape. The usage of the *sign*, the logo, the name, and how the brand can stimulate the perception, understanding and people behave. A business use sign as a major part of their marketing strategy. Therefore, the streetwear company competitively use their creativity in making signs for their own streetwear trademark. They also implied a message on their trademark to be understood by the consumer. All of those creativity that are produced by the brands are to attract people's attention and also contain a message for us to interpret the sign of the logo, the term of interpretation of the sign is recognized as Semiology (or semiotic, as it knows better in America). The theory of Semiology itself used for approaching the sign that appears in trademark, especially for streetwear trademark.

The object of this research are five famous streetwear trademarks consist of *Supreme*, *Gucci*, *Bape*, *Off-White* and *Champion*. Based on the aims, this research also analyzes respondents' perspective by using open ended-questionnaire. This research analyzes the object by using Saussurean semiotic signification supported by Barthes' and Peircian triadic model analysis. The reason why the writer conducted this research is that linguistic form is generalized to any happening context nowadays. Therefore, the writer uses famous streetwear trademarks to be analyzed in linguistic form as one of happening context.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### A. *Semiotics*

Chandler stated that semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. Semiotics is not only everything that refers to sign but anything that represent something else [1]. According to Berger, semiotics has two important figures; they are Saussure (1857-1913) and Peirce (1839-1914) [2]. Both of them develop semiotics separately with the different scientific backgrounds, Saussure as a linguist and Peirce as a philosopher. Saussure calls his science development Semiology [3]. Saussure illustrates that a sign consists of signifier and signified. Those two elements as like two sides of a coin that cannot be separated. There are two major semioticians that involve semiotic theory, they are Saussure, and Peirce [4].

Then, Barthes reveals the denotative and connotative meaning based on Saussurean semiotic signification [5].

There are three elements distinction from as the fundamental element of the structural semiotic approach, between [4]; (1) *signifier* and *signified* (2) *langage, parole, and lang* (3) *synchronic* and *diachronic*. Peirce is the founder of the philosophical doctrine as pragmatism. Peirce defines a sign in the term of semiosis as something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity [6]. In this term, Peirce determine the *subject* of a sign as the part that unseparated from the process of signification. The Triadic model of Peirce (representament + object + interpretant=sign), show the important role of the *subject* in the language transformation [6]. The sign according to Peirce is which stand in the process of the unlimited semiosis, or the process of the unlimited semiosis series, which creating the interpretant in the newest form [7].

There are various levels of signs in semiotics, which allows producing stratified meanings. Barthes explains there are two levels in signs, those are denotation and connotation [5].

Denotation is sign level which explains the relationship between signifier and signified that has explicit meaning. Denotation is the most conventional sign in a society because its relationship is on the reality or having meaning based on the dictionary. A denotation is a real meaning of a lexeme. Denotation is one of the types of meaning that is explained in semantics [7]. This explanation is similar with the one by O'Grady et al., that denotation is a semantic attempt to equate the meaning of a word or phrase with the entities. Connotation is sign level which explains the relationship between signifier and signified that does not have explicit meaning. Its meaning is not available on the dictionary list or having literary meaning [8]. According to Chaer, a connotation is a different meaning which is "added" to the last denotation meaning that is related with a sense from a person or group that uses the word [9].

#### B. Trademark

According to Gautama, trademark is a tool to distinguish items and signs used as mark. A trademark must have a distinguishing power to other similar item [10]. Meanwhile, Purwosutjipto stated that trademark is a sign which any particular item is personalized, so that a sign can distinguish from the other sign. A sign must have their own character to show their identity [11].

#### C. Function of Trademark

As noted, a trademark, and of course the trademark system, has an important role in the economy, not only in relation to the origin of the goods or services, but also concerning the quality and the position of goods and services in the market place. According to Phillips, in its essence the trademark system is designed to perform some functions, they are; to identify the actual physical origin of the goods and services, to guarantee the identity of the origin of goods and services, to guarantee the quality of goods and services, to serve as a badge of support or affiliation, to serves as an advertising symbol of the goods or services of producers, and to enable the consumer to make a lifestyle statement [12].

Related to the definition above, Muhammad stated that there are four functions of the trademark in the activities of trade in goods and services, they are; as product identity, mean of trade promotion, quality guarantee, and source of origin [13].

#### D. The Characteristic of Trademark

According to Miller and Davis, a sign which is recognized as a trademark should be distinctive from signs used by others. This is the first and important feature of a mark. This is because the historical and original function of trademark was simply to indicate the origin of goods by identifying the craftsmen who produced them [14]. Afterward, if a trademark is to protect purchasers from confusion over what they are purchasing, then the trademark somehow must be recognizable, identifiable and different from other marks. On the other hand, a trademark can only fulfill its function as a guarantee of origin if it is exclusive [15].

The distinctive characteristics of a trademark not only serve to effectively identify the origin of goods or service but also assist in calling attention to the good or service. Signs, which are trademarks, exist in many different forms. They may consist of words, names (including personal names), symbols or devices, images, sounds (or any combinations thereof), the shape of goods (three-dimensional mark), colors or color combinations and everything else that may be used to identify the particular goods or services sold or supplied in the marketplace. Trademarks are not only signs or symbols, which can be seen as representative for products or services made or supplied by trademark's owners, but also serve as an important assets of companies owning them. According to the principle of territorial limitation, a trademark will normally be registered in a certain territory or country. It will then be protected by the laws of that country.

#### E. Colour

Color is the visual perceptual property corresponding in humans to the categories called red, green, blue, and others. The seven colors of the spectrum are produced by light waves of varied lengths that reflect off tangible animate and inanimate objects [16]. Light and color are simply a matter of vibrational frequency. Chromatics, the science of color, is the study of this relationship [17]. The primary colors are the three basic hues red, blue, and yellow [18]. These colors cannot be created by mixing others, and they are the basis of all the other shades of colors which they generated. If the primary colors are mixed in equal amounts, the resulting color is always black.

### III. METHOD

This part focuses on the process of conducting the research. These include research design, data collection, and data analysis.

#### A. Research Design

In this research, the writer applied a qualitative design to solve some issues that have been elaborated above. The writer

chose qualitative design because it can describe systematically the fact and the characteristics of the data.

Denzin and Lincoln provided a generic definition of qualitative research, that is, "Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalist approach to its subject matter [19]." The 'multimethod in focus' is described as "the combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation" [20]. The descriptive research method attempts to give a complete description of people, events, objects, places, conversations and so on.

In this research, the writer used five famous streetwear trademarks consist of *Supreme*, *Gucci*, *Bape*, *Off-White*, and *Champion* including their products consist of t-shirt, hoodie, cap, jacket, and pants. The writer also used the result of questionnaire as the data.

In order to answer the third research question, this research gathered participants from Instagram. The writer collected random participants and there is no limitation of age and gender. This research used the writer's Instagram account because it reached a lot of participants and general assumptions, and also the writer has a lot of followers on his Instagram account which helped to reach a big number of respondents. In the result, the writer found 127 respondents' who commented in the open-ended questionnaire. The writer chose the whole respondents as participants.

As the first step of collecting the data, the writer gathered trademarks from [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). The writer collected the original trademarks of each product. After collecting the original trademarks, the writer then accessed the official websites of *Supreme*, *Gucci*, *Bape*, *Off-White* and *Champion* to collect the any catalogs of the products. The writer used open-ended questionnaire to the participants by voting the most favorite trademarks product according to the participants including the reason they choose them to know the reason that one of those trademarks is more dominant than any other trademarks.

#### B. Data Analysis

The writer analyzed the semiotic signification of each trademarks based on their color and logo meaning by using Saussurean theory to get interpretation. Afterward, the writer elaborated the result of the semiotic signification to a diagram and an explanation which involve Peirce's theory.

The writer collected the result of the open-ended questionnaire into some categories. After dividing categories, the writer created table to be fulfilled according to its category. Then, the writer analyzed which trademark has the biggest number of voter and what reason is the most chosen by the respondents. The writer transcript the data into table.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Semiotic Signification and the Meaning Analysis

1) *Supreme*: Signifier/Denotation :This picture is a red rectangle box which consists of a white italic written language of "Supreme". Signified/Connotation: The highest, purity, and courageous.

2) *Gucci*: Signifier/Denotation : This picture is the black double "G" alphabetical logo and a written language of "Gucci". Signified/Connotation: Glamorous, luxurious and balanced perspectives.\

3) *Bape*: Signifier/Denotation : This picture is a logo of the face of a brown ape and a written language of "Bape". Signified/Connotation: Special, mysterious, wild, classic, and timeless.

4) *Off-White*: Signifier/Denotation : This picture is a logo of black and white diagonal stripes and a written language of "White". Signified/Connotation: Good social attitude and balance.

5) *Champion*: Signifier/Denotation : This picture is a logo of blue and red "C" letter and a written language of "Champion". Signified/Connotation: Well-skilled and good passion.

### B. Icon and Symbol Analysis

1) *Supreme*: Supreme's trademark is mainly symbolized by the red strip of red color which consist of the word of Supreme inside it. In the picture above, the trademark of Supreme is painted with red color. Actually, it is important to be aware of the concept of red color in Supreme trademark as a fundamental principle of Supreme products to distinguish from the other. In the other meaning, the red rectangle box personates courage and strength, while the written language Supreme means the highest. It can be interpreted as bringing people the pure courage and strength, and also stigmatize people that this brand is the highest level of the brand and it is worth to be worn by all circles of people.

2) *Gucci*: Gucci's trademark is mainly symbolized by the double "G" alphabetical logo and a written language of Gucci. In the picture above, the trademark of Gucci is a normal G and another G stretched to the left. Actually, it is important to be aware of the concept logo in Gucci trademark as a fundamental principle of Gucci products to distinguish from the other similar logo trademark like Chanel with the double "C" alphabetical logo. In the other meaning, the black Gucci's logo shape represents luxurious and a balanced perspective. The written language Gucci represents glamorous, chill, cool and awesome. It can be interpreted that Gucci products are seem unique and glamorous for any people perspectives.

3) *Bape*: Bape's trademark is mainly symbolized by the face of a brown ape logo and a written language of Bape. According to the meaning, the Bape's logo shape represents mysterious creature, classic, and timeless. The written language of "Bape" represents wild and special. It can be interpreted that Bape's products gives an image of a

mysterious, classic and special person, and it also gives an image of a timeless products.

4) *Off-white*: Off-White's trademark is mainly symbolized by the black and white diagonal stripes logo and a written language of "White". According to the meaning, the Off-White's logo shape represents a balance of color and anti-racism. The written language "White" represents good social attitude. It can be interpreted that Off-White's gives an image of good social attitude and anti-racism people.

5) *Champion*: Champion's trademark is mainly symbolized by the red and blue "C" letter logo and a written language of "Champion". According to the meaning, the Champion's logo shape represents good passion. The written language "Champion" represents a winner. It can be interpreted that Champion's product gives an image of a well-skilled person which has a good passion.

### C. *The Aspect of One Trademark More Dominant Than the Other*

After doing the open-ended questionnaire, the writer found 127 comments. The reasons were divided into 4 categories according to the dominance reasons from the rest of the comments, there are brand price, brand design, brand fame, and brand quality. It was found 22 respondents who voted *Supreme* among the rest of trademarks. There were 2 respondents who voted *Supreme* by its brand fame, 12 respondents by its brand design, 2 respondents by its brand price, and 6 respondents by its brand material. The writer found 22 respondents who voted *Gucci* among the rest of trademarks. There were 2 respondents who voted *Gucci* by its brand fame, 18 respondents by its brand design, 2 respondents by its brand price, and no respondent voted it by its brand material. Twenty-two respondents who voted *BAPE* among the rest of trademarks. There were 2 respondents who voted *BAPE* by its brand fame, 20 respondents by its brand design, 1 respondent by its brand price, and 1 respondent by its brand material. Thirty-Five respondents who voted *Off-White* among the rest of trademarks. There was no respondent who voted *Off-White* by its brand fame, 33 respondents by its brand design, 1 respondent by its brand price, and 1 respondent by its brand material. Twenty-four respondents who voted *Champion* among the rest of trademarks. There were 2 respondents who voted *Champion* by its brand fame, 18 respondents by its brand design, 3 respondents by its brand price, and 1 respondent by its brand material.

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on findings and discussion, the writer found *signifier* and *signified* in each trademark consist of *Supreme*, *Gucci*, *BAPE*, *Off-White*, and *Champion*. Besides, the writer also found denotation and connotation meaning of each trademarks. Afterward, by using the Pierce's triadic analysis, the writer found 5 icons and 5 symbols, the writer got 5 meaning of 5 trademarks, and each trademark had different sign and also

different meaning. These differences had given different interpretations. From the semiotic analysis of 5 trademarks, the trademark's message can be clearly understood by the consumer.

From the conclusions above, the writer suggests some points to the readers that each of trademarks consist of various meaning that have to be more understood by the consumer. The writer also suggests the readers who want to analyze streetwear trademarks and general semiotic theory that there are still a lot of thing of trademarks that have to be analyzed, especially on their brand products. Finally, the writer hopes that this research will be useful for the future semiotical research, especially for the English Education Department students who want to analyze semiotical research.

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