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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## A SEMIO-SEMANTIC STUDY OF REUTERS' (NEWS AGENCY) PHOTOGRAPHS.

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**Abstract**

This study aimed at investigating and considering the semio-semantics features of Reuters' news agency social photos. In this study, 30 photographs comprising the survey data were collected using simple random library research. The research adopted a descriptive – analytical approach to conduct the study and data were based on Pierce semiotic perspective and Burgin's artistic critical approach. The present study sought to answer this question that "which linguistics signs were used more in Reuters' social photos?" and "What are the gender representations in Reuters' social photographs?". The results showed that along with the iconic signs, the indexical signs enjoyed a better position in being used in the news photos and symbolic signs are used to a lesser extent compared to the other types. The results also suggested that the gender representation in Reuters' social photos is mostly male-oriented and men were shown to be more active and hardworking than women.

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**Introduction:-**

A sign is a logo or icon used to refer to a phrase or convey a concept. Semiotics is the science of signs cognition aiming at recognizing the orders and rules that play part in conveying the meaning. Signs have always played a crucial role in human life, human's mental dimensions and image and art manifestation. Whether in the prehistoric era and in early human life or in the shadow of an ancient and glorious civilization, or in today's world of media, especially media such as photos, signs play a very decisive role. Signs in the images serve a specific concept and purpose beyond itself as the directive and symbolic language linger in human conscious and unconscious attention. The fact that what a picture (photograph) is and how we can study photograph semiotics by utilizing a picture as an image sign is not a new issue. But the point that how picture semiotics and Semio-semantics can make a distinctive quality from drawing semiotics at different news, sports and social levels is of much consideration and importance. Accordingly, the social photo semio-semantics can open new horizons in the field of signs and different photo semiotics. Therefore, the problem posed in this study is that how photos that have social implications and are used in the fields of media and news agencies can reflect the various social events?

Considering the importance of semiotics in photography and dominant role of linguistics approaches in semiotic discussions, this study intended to using different photos and analyzing them in order to decipher their meanings as much as possible, thereby to test the effectiveness of theoretical issues in semiotics. The purpose of this study was to investigate the photo semiotic mainly focusing on Reuters' social photo semiotics. Consequently, two questions are proposed: "what kinds of linguistics signs are mainly used in Reuters' social photos? And "what sorts of gender representation are used in Reuters' social photo? " Today, human life is surrounded by a variety of visual cues making human inevitable in their reading. We cannot remember a day being spent without seeing and reading these photos being exposed to us without our questioning.

Now with photos which talk to us like written texts and have penetrated deep in our lives, identifying and understanding the relationship among signs in photography and their corresponding social functions can cast light on many social phenomena and historical concepts. On the other hand, the idea of understanding the world in terms of its structure has long been the subject of many philosophical theories. Considering the importance of language in the study of sign systems and also the important role that photos play in human societies, we focus on photos semiotics studying. In this study, we have used the library research for data collection including 30 photographs from Reuters news agencies with social themes about the customs, traditions, culture, etc which were collected using simple random sampling being conducted through cross-sectional study.

### **Literature review:-**

Barthes (1977: 13) in an article, entitled meanings of visual expression, expressed a certain position for the photographic images which accounted for the unencrypted messages. Among all kinds of images, it is just the photos that have the ability to give all the information without having any difficulty in the interpretation. For this reason, he considered the photo message as a continuous message that is the result of a mechanical record, not a transfer between signifier and signified.

Mohsenian Rad (2006: 194) quoting from De Fleur & Dennis (1996) wrote about the different types of signs stating that "signs are well understood by animals as well as humans, while the symbols are not. Signs have proprietary function, while symbols represent the widest sense and contain less reality. Visual signs are the same as their origin and thus are convincing and understandable almost without any explanation, while symbols are exclusively understood through the social concept which must be learned through direct instruction. Symbols are more complex than signs". Du boa (1983), by attributing meaning to an index, is considered as true Peirce orthodox. According to this view, each symbol is explained not only because of the actual contact between the surface expression, reference or content, but more than this, for the embodiment and representation of the principles that are called "Selection and uniqueness" features.

### **Theoretical Framework:-**

Saussure (1916) recognized linguistic sign as mutualistic substance with two approaches of being comprised of sound image (signifier) and concept (signified). The signifier is the concrete part of a sign but the signified is the hidden side. These two aspects are fully integrated and each one is represented by the other. Saussure stated that sign components are inseparable as the sides of a coin which shows the coin simultaneously. Sound image (signifier) is not a Mother's Voice that has a physical aspect but it is the mental effect beyond the sound being represented by our senses. Therefore, sound image (signifier) is not a sound, and the signified also is not something that exists in the world outside of language. Both of these phenomena are subjective and belong to Longue's abstract system. Since the sign language is the relationship between signifier and signified and has a subjective nature and each of these aspects help contribute to establish such relationship, therefore, signified in Saussure's model is not applied in the outside world for a referent, but rather it is a conceptually subjective issue. Signs denote concepts and are not used for relations and things that always occur at the level of conceptual categories.

Since Saussure emphasized the Longue's abstract and social system, he ignores the different cryptographs which can affect the variable meaning system at Parole level. Considering the status of Sign language within the language system, Saussure believed that language signs are components of a language system that have a mutual relationship from phonetic differences that have been combined with a chain of semantic differences to what emerges which has a form but not a substance. In Saussure's view, there is no independent Sign and the meaning of a sign is achieved through a distinction and contrast with other signs in the systems. Our understanding of the meaning is based on the internal relations of social and mental system. So, Saussure sees meaning in time due to the difference.

The signified is the signifiers interaction which does not have a definite end. Prior to being a notion which is closely linked to a certain signifier, meaning is the result of a potential and endless interaction between signifiers. Finally, it can be concluded that the logical continuation of Saussure's view on meaning which rests on the differentiation of signs in a system would be the separation of signifier and the signified. He found that a sign is the combination of the signifier and the signified, but he failed to find out when these phenomena are combined, and when they would lead into meaning.

Charles Peirce (1931), the logician and pragmatist philosopher, coined what Saussure has addressed Semiology as Semiotics. The issue is related to something that Sign is referred to. Sign in its representation does not replace the subject and is not necessarily material and is able to determine the interpretation. Therefore, the interpretation is a meaning achieved through representation. In other words, it is a represented sign in the minds of the audience. Pierce called the interaction between representation, subject and interpretation as Semiosis which can be perhaps referred to as the whole semantics process. Thus, from the Pierce's perspective, a Sign is an image that its subject is made clear through the third image interpretation. The interpreted concept is a sign and such proportion continues to infinity. While Saussure points to the symbolic and arbitrary aspects of a Sign, Peirce considers a wider aspect for a sign which is made of a combination of three iconic, indexical and symbolic aspects which are as follows(1931):

#### **Iconic signs:-**

They are based on the similarity of signifier and signified or sign and theme relationship. For example, photographs, cartoons and replica, phonemes, metaphor, real sounds in music and etc.

#### **Indexical signs:-**

They are based on a causal or physical relationship between the signifier and signified. This relationship is not arbitrary like a smoke which is the sign of fire or in languages such as personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place.

#### **Symbolic signs:-**

An abstract or arbitrary relationship with a dependent signified including linguistic signs, musical notes, Morse alphabet and others. Implications play an important role in symbolic signs.

#### **Data Analysis:-**

Among the 30 Photos analyzed in this part of the study, for example, the analysis of five images is presented. Then, the results of the study presented in tables and graphs will be provided.

##### **Photo 1:**



In this image, an Iranian man with an advanced technology in his hands seeks to recede away from his traditional model and move into a more civilized and modern model. The photographer is trying to show that these people in Iran are trying to get separated from their traditional life and culture and turn to something more fun, entertaining and learn new things. Accordingly, the Iranian men select a different outfit from their traditional ones. The use of tight clothing, a different look and different jewelries that they wear point to the fact that they are moving from tradition to modernity. In this photo, the indexical relationship is consistent with Victor-Bergin's approach because he believes that the image, based on the Semio-semantics prospective, can only be indexical and the signifier/signified relationship is established between the Sign and meaning. In addition to the indexical relationship, because of the similarities in the image and the subject for each photo, the iconic relationship is also perceivable.

##### **Photo 2:**



In this photo, a view of the Sunday market in Kordkoy, northern Iran, has been depicted. According to Pierce (1931), there existed a cause and effect relationship between signifier and signified, that is, people's consideration of old traditions is the cause and holding weekly markets in northern cities is the effect. Therefore, based on the sign semio- semantics, the governing relationship in this photo is indexical. That's why Bergin's ideas were used to analyze this photo. In addition, because of the similarities in the image and the subject for each photo, the iconic relationship is also used.

Photo 3:



In the image shown above, women, like men, participate in social activities outside home in Iranian society, their activities outside home can be one of those hi-tech businesses, and those who work in these social environments with some modern equipment and technology, have different appearance far from those of traditional men and women. The photographer has attempted to make the point that life in Iran is going through some big changes and young Iranians are trying to live with technology and modernity. The use of technology by men and women are depicted in the photo indicating their interest in new technology and passing the traditions, therefore, the relationship between signifier and signified is of iconic type and direct.

Photo 4:

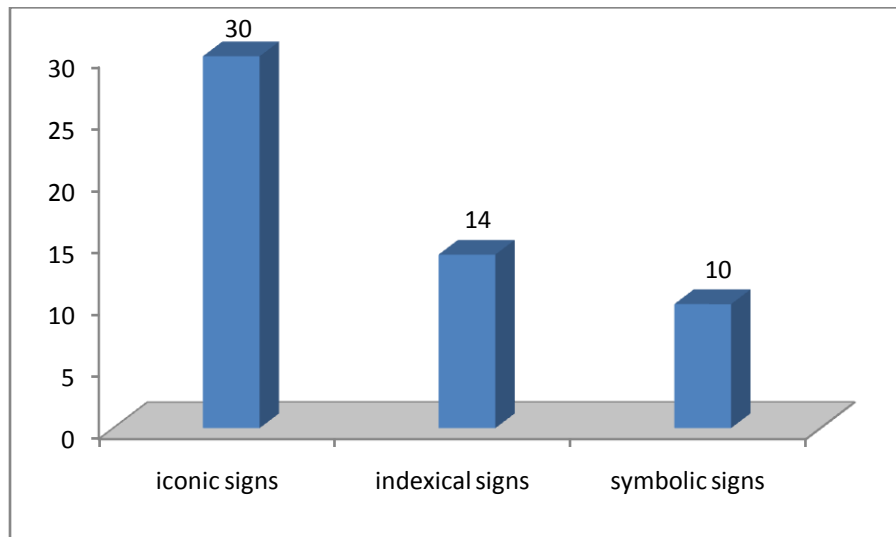


This photo shows the nose surgery in Iran. According to the global statistics, Iran is one of the countries that have the maximum number of cosmetic surgery annually. Based on the Peirce's ideas on sign, the photo is indexical type, so the cause is to be beautiful and achieve cultural and social acceptance in the society, and the cosmetic surgery is the effect. The indexical relationship in this photo shed light on the consistency with the Victor-Bergin's approach because he believes that the image, based on the Semio-semantics prospective, can only be indexical and the signifier/ signified relationship is established between the Sign and meaning.

Photo 5:



In this photo, an Iranian girl who won the billiards championship in international competitions has been shown in practice. When a girl attempts to do this kind of sport at the international level, she tries to pose a kind of abnormalities against the social and cultural traditions. Considering the semio- semantics features for this photo, there is a deviation of norms and normality. There existed a symbolic relationship between Sign and meaning. According to Pierce, those who do sport and activities contrary to the usual social norms in a given society, they stick to a symbol of opposition to social norms accepted by society indicating lack of limitations acceptance that society imposes on young people, especially women.



**Figure 1:-** the frequency distribution of different kinds of sign in Reuters' photos

### Conclusion:-

This study examined 30 photos from Reuters news agency. The study revealed that this news agency's photographers like other social services attempted to take pictures with the intention of demonstrating and evaluating previous and current challenges covering a problem or social issue. Examining more photos in research, it was determined that social and cultural issues of Iran have been highly scrutinized and reviewed. The causal relationship, that is the same as indexical signs, is used to convey meaning to the audience, for the photographer has attempted to do the photography with the specific purpose of showing social problems in Iran. So, the photographer tried to cast light on an issue through photos and related the reason to an issue in the society. Therefore, most of Reuters news agency photos are of signifier and signified (cause/effect) relationship type. Considering the fact that data analyzed in this study are photos, all photos have iconic relationship with the subject and their relationship is based on similarity. The number of iconic relationship is 30 enjoying the highest frequency among others. The indexical sign in 14 cases showed signifier and signified (cause/effect) relationship establishing a relation between the sign and meaning. Also, the symbolic sign used in 10 photos showed no similarity between the sign and the subject, but rather there existed an arbitrary relationship between the sign and the theme (meaning). In other words, this relationship needs to be learned. Based on the conducted analysis, gender social representation in Reuters news agency photos is almost male-centered. Most of the photos focus on men's social affairs and their activities in the community which is highly visible in number 3, 4 and 5, while fewer women have been taken into consideration in these photos.

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