

Semiotic Analysis of Social Media Advertisement in The Competitive Landscape of Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: This study examines the use of semiotic elements in social media advertisements for early childhood education institutions using Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of signs. In the increasingly competitive landscape of early childhood education, institutions utilize various marketing strategies to attract parents. However, the effectiveness of these advertisements depends on how icons, indexes, and symbols construct meaning and influence parental decision-making. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, analyzing selected advertisements from various preschool institutions on social media. The data is examined using Peirce's semiotic framework, identifying the role of visual and textual signs in shaping parental perceptions. The findings reveal that icons, such as images of joyful children and interactive learning environments, create an impression of a nurturing and stimulating school setting. Indexes, including bright colors, playful fonts, and engaging visuals, evoke feelings of warmth, fun, and child-friendliness. Symbols, such as accreditation badges, exclusive program labels, and statistical claims, reinforce credibility and the institution's competitive advantage. While these strategies effectively attract prospective students, they may also contribute to unrealistic parental expectations shaped by idealized marketing narratives. This study highlights the need for a critical understanding of how semiotic elements influence consumer perception in the competitive early childhood education sector.

Keywords: Semiotic, Early Childhood Education, Social Media.

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A. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic, early childhood education in Indonesia has undergone significant development and diversification. One of the most noticeable trends is the increasing number of early childhood institutions, including PAUD (Early Childhood Education Centers), tutoring services, and alternative models like nature schools (*sekolah alam*). According to national data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's Dapodik system, as of September 1, 2024, the addition of 967 new PAUD (Early Childhood Education) institutions in 2024 far exceeded the growth seen at other levels of education compared to 2023. However, an ironic situation exists at the PAUD level the increase in the number of schools was not accompanied by a rise in student enrollment. On the contrary, the number of PAUD students significantly declined by 203,936 in 2024.

This discrepancy raises important questions about the effectiveness of outreach and communication strategies among early childhood institutions. Despite the growing number of schools, the decrease in student participation suggests that many parents may not be fully persuaded or aware of the value and offerings of these new educational options. It also implies that the messages conveyed through educational advertising, including social media campaigns, may not be effectively reaching or resonating with their intended audience

especially parents. This surge is closely tied to how modern parents, particularly younger generations, now view early education as an essential foundation for future success. According to Firdayani (2021), during the Covid-19 era, the sudden shift to remote learning led many parents to worry about their children's academic progress, especially in basic literacy. These concerns drove parents to seek supplementary education such as early schooling or private lessons, even before children enter formal education.

This heightened awareness is also rooted in developmental psychology. According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, children aged 0–8 years are in a critical stage often referred to as the **"golden age."** At this stage, children experience rapid development across several key domains: cognitive (thinking and memory), physical-motor (coordination and movement), social (interaction and adaptability), and emotional (feelings and expression). Ardiansyah (via *Kumparan*) emphasizes that during this golden period, children absorb vast amounts of information through sensory experiences, which become the foundation of their learning and personal development. This underscores the vital role of early childhood education in nurturing and managing each child's potential in alignment with their natural learning style. Education can be said to be ideal if it pays attention to various dimensions, such as intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions (Tabroni, 2022). Preparedness and planning that is mature and synergized well will provide calm and a comfortable learning atmosphere, thus affecting the child's personality. (Tabroni, 2022).

UNESCO has formulated four foundational pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together (Priscilla & Yudhyarta, 2021). These pillars emphasize not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of practical skills, personal growth, and the ability to coexist harmoniously in a multicultural society. In line with this, early childhood education plays a vital role in shaping children's development. Now, another view has developed which states that the most dominant factor influencing individual success in life is not solely determined by high intellectual intelligence, but it is determined by the emotional stability factor which experts call emotional or emotional intelligence (in Tabroni., Goleman, 1995).

Beyond educational substance, the competition among early childhood institutions is increasingly visible in the digital realm. Traditional marketing methods, such as brochures and word-of-mouth, were often insufficient in generating strong public interest in enrolling children in early childhood education (ECE). In contrast, managing ECE advertising through social media has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for promoting ECE to a broader audience (Marklund, 2015). Institutions use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to promote their programs and values. With today's young parents especially mothers being highly active on these platforms, the visual and narrative elements of social media advertising play a key role in shaping parental perceptions and decisions.

In this study, the researcher aims to explore how educational advertisements on social media conveyed their message effectively reaching and influencing parents, especially mothers as key decision-makers in early education. Therefore, this study also seeks to analyze how educational institutions maintain their competitiveness in an increasingly saturated market. To analyze this, the study will employ semiotic analysis based on Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model, which includes the sign (representamen), the object, and the interpretant. In addition, this research also uses Michael Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory (1980), which suggests that organizations can outperform competitors by applying three key strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Through this framework, the study seeks to understand how visual symbols, captions, and brand messaging in digital educational ads function to construct meaning and influence maternal decision-making.

The subjects of this study consist of two formal school, Sekolah Cikal and Starland School and two non-formal educational institutions, Kalananti and SempoasIP, selected

based on their popularity and the uniqueness of their educational approaches. These institutions were purposively chosen due to their active engagement on social media platforms and their strategic use of digital content to build brand identity, communicate educational values, and attract the attention of parents, especially young mothers who are highly responsive to online content.

Sekolah Cikal and Starland School is recognized as a progressive formal educational institution that emphasizes personalized, character-based, and contextual learning. The school actively utilizes social media to showcase student activities, promote educational philosophies, and engage emotionally with its audience through compelling storytelling. Meanwhile, Kalananti stands out for its unique approach by offering coding and robotics programs for early childhood learners, reflecting the growing need for digital literacy from a young age. SempoaSIP, on the other hand, is a well-established mental arithmetic course designed to enhance children's concentration, logical thinking, and calculation speed.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a focus on semiotic analysis based on the theory of Charles Sanders Peirce. The aim of this research is to interpret and describe how educational institutions construct meaning through their visual and textual advertisements on social media, particularly in the context of early childhood education. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative methods aims to interpret phenomena in their natural settings and understand how individuals construct meaning from symbols and signs in social contexts. In line with this, the study applies Peirce's semiotic theory as the analytical tool to explore the symbolic structures embedded in social media advertisements for early childhood education.

The data sources in this study are three selected educational institutions, consisting of two formal school Sekolah Cikal and Starland School. Two non-formal learning centers Kalananti and SempoaSIP. These institutions were purposively selected based on their popularity, distinctiveness in educational offerings, and active use of social media platforms for promotional and communicative purposes. Each institution represents a unique approach to early childhood learning: formal schooling, digital literacy through coding and robotics, and mental arithmetic development. The primary data consists of visual and textual content taken from the social media advertisements of the selected institutions, specifically from platforms Instagram. Data collection was conducted through questioner and documentation, involving 10 young parents with 15 questions about the importance of early childhood education and the capture and of images, captions, and promotional posts uploaded within a specified time frame.

Semiotics is the study of signs and everything related to signs, including how they function, their relationship with other signs, the sender, and the receiver (Marshelio and Tamburin 2021). The analytical framework is grounded in Peirce's triadic model of semiotics (in Puspitasari 2021), which interprets signs as comprising three interconnected elements: the representamen (the sign itself), the object (what the sign refers to), and the interpretant (the meaning constructed by the viewer). According to Peirce, a sign is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity." Peirce believed that in order a sign to function, there must be something that enables to do it, which he referred to as the ground. Consequently, a sign (or representamen) always exists within a triadic relationship: the ground (denotatum), the object, and the interpretant. A sign can only function when it is interpreted in the mind of the receiver through the interpretant. The interpretant is the understanding or meaning that arises in the mind of the sign's receiver. Through this model, the research investigates how symbols, colors, language, and layout in advertisements create

meaning and influence the decision-making process of mothers when choosing educational services for their children. The results of this analysis are expected to reveal patterns, values, and persuasive strategies embedded in the semiotic structure of educational advertising, as well as the cultural assumptions that underlie them, especially in a digital society where parenting and schooling choices are increasingly mediated by online content.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Sekolah Cikal (Cikal's School)

Cikal School Bandung is one of the branches of Sekolah Cikal, a progressive and holistic educational institution in Indonesia that offers programs from early childhood to secondary levels. Located in a tranquil area of Bandung, this school adopts a learner-centered and inquiry-based approach that emphasizes character development, student agency, and interdisciplinary learning. Cikal's curriculum integrates international education standards, including elements of the International Baccalaureate (IB), while remaining rooted in its core philosophy of nurturing lifelong learners. The school promotes five core competencies known as the "5 Stars of Cikal Learners," which include being self-regulated, emotionally intelligent, globally aware, well-rounded, and socially responsible.

In line with current trends in educational marketing and digital engagement, Sekolah Cikal Bandung actively utilizes social media platforms as a medium to communicate its vision, showcase student achievements, and engage with both existing and prospective families. Platforms such as Instagram to highlight daily school activities, promote educational values, and build a strong online presence.

Representmen



Picture 1. Advertisement Sekolah Cikal (source Instagram)

Object

- Modern and high-quality early childhood education institution.
- School that emphasizes joyful learning, literacy, and cognitive development.
- Trustworthy and welcoming learning environment for children.
- Promotional effort to attract all young parents by highlighting an upcoming event and a limited-time discount.

Interpretant

- The visual warmth and bright environment suggest safety, creativity, and modern learning.
- The children's joyful expressions and reading activity imply positive energy.
- The phrase "*Kenal lebih dekat*" builds an emotional connection, inviting parents to experience the school personally.
- The discount offer creates a sense of urgency and value, appealing to parents' economic considerations.

Representmen



Picture 2. Advertisement Sekolah Cikal (*source Instagram*)

- a. Text: "Understanding the Meaning of Parenting and Its Influence on a Child's Personality."
- b. Cikal logo and the number "25" (marking the school's 25th anniversary).
- c. Dominant colors: blue and orange - commonly associated with education, enthusiasm, and warmth
- d. Three people: most likely a teacher and two students.

Object

- a. Parenting approaches: The text highlights that the content deals with raising and educating children.
- b. Character education: The presence of an adult and children suggests that personality development is fostered through education.
- c. Warmth and emotional closeness: Facial expressions and the interaction between the adult and children emphasize affection and nurturing.

Interpretant

- a. The role of adults (parents/teachers) is essential in a child's development - symbolized by the adult figure engaging with the children.
- b. Sekolah Cikal promotes a positive and emotionally supportive approach to parenting and education - suggesting that the school values emotional well-being as much as academics.
- c. Education is a collaborative process - depicted through active interaction between adults and children.
- d. The 25th anniversary branding conveys trust, longevity, and credibility as an experienced institution.

From the semiotic analysis of both images, it can be concluded that Sekolah Cikal strategically positions itself as a modern, trustworthy, and emotionally supportive educational institution. Through visual signs such as joyful children, warm color schemes, and emotionally engaging messages, the school emphasizes its commitment to joyful learning, character development, and close collaboration with parents.

The use of promotional language and anniversary branding reinforces both the credibility and relevance of the institution in the eyes of young parents. Overall, these visual advertisements are crafted to build an emotional bond, highlight educational quality, and generate trust and urgency in the audience's perception.

2. Starland

Starland Preschool & Kindergarten is an early childhood education institution located in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The school offers programs for toddlers (1–2 years), nursery (2–4 years), and kindergarten (4–6 years), emphasizing play-based learning to stimulate sensory and motor skills. Their curriculum incorporates the International Early Years Curriculum (IEYC) and Multiple Intelligences approach, aiming to develop life skills, emotional intelligence, and early literacy in a fun and memorable way. Starland provides a home-like environment that fosters independence, responsibility, and a love for learning.

Representmen



Picture 3. Advertisement Starland (source *instagram*)

- The phrase “Sing and Jam!” written in bold, playful font.
- Illustrations of children playing musical instruments (drums, guitar, keyboard).
- A bright yellow circle stating “Age 1.5 – 4 years old”.
- Icon-based visuals for activities like Rhythm & Movement, Sing & Dance, Playing Instruments, etc.
- Detailed information about event date, time, and venue.
- Use of bright colors (blue, yellow, pink) and cartoon characters.
- The cheerful invitation text “Let’s Have Fun and Don’t Miss It!” inside a speech bubble.
- The WhatsApp logo and phrase “Register Here”.

Object

- Early childhood education based on music and movement.
- Emphasizes the development of motor skills, rhythm, self-expression, and social interaction through fun and engaging learning.

Interpretant

- Technology is neither inherently good nor bad – its value depends on how it's applied and managed
- Parents and teachers must play an active role in guiding children through the digital world
- The image sends a clear message that digital literacy is essential in today’s world, but must be paired with supervision and understanding
- The Kalananti branding implies that the platform offers educational solutions to help children navigate digital challenges effectively

Representmen



Picture 4. Advertisement Starland (source Instagram)

- a. A fun and child-friendly learning environment.
- b. Cheerful colors, cute cartoon characters and bold headline with playful font.
- c. Visuals of children playing and learning actively.
- d. Informative text about the benefits of trial classes.

Object

- a. A school environment that is welcoming and enjoyable for children.
- b. An educational system that is open and transparent for parents.
- c. Parental decision-making in choosing the right school.

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Interpretant

- a. Children will feel comfortable and happy during the trial class.
- b. Parents can directly observe the teaching methods and classroom atmosphere.
- c. A trial class is seen as a crucial step in selecting the right school.
- d. Bright colors and friendly visuals create a positive and family-friendly impression.

3. Kalananti

Kalananti is an innovative educational platform in Indonesia focused on developing digital skills for children, particularly in the field of coding, computational thinking, and technology literacy. It is designed to prepare children for the challenges of the 21st century through fun, structured, and age-appropriate digital learning experiences. Through project-based learning and guidance from experienced instructors, Kalananti encourages children to become **creators of technology**, not just passive users. Its vision is to become a leading digital education platform in Southeast Asia that empowers the next generation of innovators. With both online and offline class options, Kalananti offers a flexible solution for parents and educators who want to introduce digital skills to children from an early age in a safe, engaging, and future-oriented way.

Representmen



Picture 5. Advertisement Kalananti (source instagram)

- a. Main text: "Technology: Challenge or Opportunity?"
- b. Kalananti by Ruangguru logo
- c. An adult male with a questioning/serious expression

- d. A young girl holding a digital device (tablet or smartphone)
- e. Digital icons: a robot, light bulb (idea), coding symbol (</>), digital cloud
- f. Swipe direction and text: "Swipe to Find Out More >>"
- g. A blue-dominated color scheme, conveying a modern and tech-oriented mood

Object

- a. The development of technology in children's education – reflecting how technology has become part of kids' everyday lives.
- b. The ambivalent role of technology – it can be either a challenge or an opportunity depending on how it's used.
- c. The role of parents and educators – represented by the adult male who appears to be reflecting on the impact of technology.
- d. A focus on digital literacy and safety for children – coding symbols and shield icons suggest both empowerment and protection

Interpretant

- a. Technology is neither inherently good nor bad – its value depends on how it's applied and managed
- b. Parents and teachers must play an active role in guiding children through the digital world
- c. The image sends a clear message that digital literacy is essential in today's world, but must be paired with supervision and understanding
- d. The Kalananti branding implies that the platform offers educational solutions to help children navigate digital challenges effectively

Representmen



Picture 6. Advertisement Kalananti (source Instagram)

- a. A male figure (Indonesian Minister of Primary and Secondary Education) is speaking while holding a microphone.
- b. Logo of Kalananti by Ruangguru.
- c. Main Text: "Ministry of Education and Culture Discusses Coding and AI Education for Elementary School Students"
- d. Additional Text: "Hmm, what could be the benefits of this?"
- e. The background shows a coding block interface (like Scratch) and a text editor for programming code.
- f. Supporting icons such as HTML tags (</>), a rocket (symbolizing progress/innovation), and light blue to white gradient representing technology and modernity.

Object

- A current and important issue: The Ministry of Education and Culture is considering the implementation of coding and AI at the elementary school level.
- Technology as a crucial skill for the future, to be taught from an early age.
- The role of the government and educators in advancing digital literacy for Indonesian children.

Interpretant

- People might see this as a positive and forward-thinking step. Teaching coding and AI in elementary school shows that education is starting to keep up with the digital world.
- Kalananti is seen as a platform that understands the needs of future learning. It offers tech-based education that fits with what students will need in the modern world.
- This also shows that the government is serious about preparing the younger generation. By teaching digital skills early, they're helping children get ready to succeed in the digital age.

4. SempoaSip

Sempoa SIP is a leading educational institution specializing in informal education for children aged 3 to 12 years. t the core of Sempoa SIP's curriculum is the development of a "mental abacus," a technique that enhances visual-spatial abilities, concentration, mathematical skills, and overall learning capacity. This approach is particularly effective for children in their formative years, aiming to unlock their full brain potential and foster a love for learning

Representmen



Picture 7. Advertisement SempoaSip (source Instagram)

- A bold headline: "Overcoming Children's Bad Habits"
- An image of a child who looks frustrated, embarrassed, or anxious.
- A yellow cartoon character with a pink bow and a worried/panicked expression (Sempoa SIP's mascot).
- A simple home interior background, with a window, TV, and wall art.
- Dominant color: orange – giving a bright yet urgent and attention-grabbing vibe.
- Text "Every child can develop bad habits, like nail-biting or procrastination."
- Branding: Sempoa SIP logo at the top and bottom.

Object

- Bad habits in children are real issues that can be noticed and addressed.

- b. Parents need to pay extra attention to their child's habits because they can have long-term effects.
- c. Children's emotions matter — the visuals of both the child and the cartoon character reflect the emotional struggles that come with these habits.
- d. Educational institutions like Sempoa SIP have a role in helping parents manage and improve their children's behavior. Bad habits in children are real issues that can be noticed and addressed.

Interpretant

- a. Bad habits in children aren't just behavioral, they also involve emotional and psychological aspects.
- b. Parents are not alone, organizations like Sempoa SIP are there to support them.
- c. The cartoon character softens the message, making it more approachable for both children and parents.
- d. The image gives a sense of hope, it's not just about highlighting a problem but also offering a solution.

Representmen



Picture 8. Advertisement SempoaSip (source Instagram)

- a. Main headline: **"5 Benefits of Abacus Training for Kids"**
- b. A pre-teen or teenage girl wearing a bright-colored uniform, holding up one finger in a "number 1" gesture with a confident smile.
- c. Sempoa SIP's signature cartoon character (round, yellow, expressive) this time smiling and waving.
- d. Dominant orange background with room elements like a bookshelf, a potted plant, and a monitor screen showing a heart rate-like graph.
- e. Consistent branding: Sempoa SIP logo at the top and bottom.

Object

- a. Abacus training is not just about numbers — it brings a range of benefits to children.
- b. Children who learn abacus are portrayed as confident, cheerful, and smart.
- c. The cartoon character acts as a visual aid to make the message more fun and child friendly.
- d. Sempoa SIP positions itself as a fun and beneficial educational institution for kids

Interpretant

- a. Parents may feel that abacus training is not only good for sharpening their child's mind but also for building confidence and motivation.
- b. Kids in the program are associated with academic success and emotional balance.
- c. The bright colors, happy expressions, and the number "5" suggest that the benefits are clear, specific, and immediately valuable.

- d. The use of friendly terms like “moms” creates emotional closeness and gives the message a warm, approachable marketing tone.

Based on the semiotic analysis of the advertisements from Sekolah Cikal, Kalananti, Sempoa SIP Academy, and Starland School, it is evident that each institution uses unique visual and symbolic strategies to convey their educational values, yet all aim to establish trust and emotional resonance with parents. Sekolah Cikal uses warm colors, images of joyful interactions between adults and children, and messages about parenting and character education. The representamen centers around human connection, the object reflects a nurturing educational philosophy, and the interpretant invites parents to view the school as a partner in emotional and academic development.

Kalananti, on the other hand, employs futuristic, tech-oriented visuals such as coding icons, tablets, and reflective expressions to introduce the idea of digital readiness. Its signs present both the challenges and opportunities of technology, positioning the platform as a guide for digital literacy, and encouraging parents to take an active role in their children’s digital education. Sempoa SIP takes a different route by using vibrant colors, energetic visuals of children, and symbols of mental arithmetic tools like the abacus. Its representamen includes cheerful graphics and educational phrases promoting focus and brain development. The object refers to cognitive enhancement through structured learning, while the interpretant encourages parents to view Sempoa SIP as both fun and intellectually enriching.

Starland School uses colorful, playful visuals and cartoon characters to emphasize a fun and child-friendly learning environment. The content, fully presented in English, includes detailed information about trial classes and benefits, while also using symbols such as a scale icon, school visuals, and activity icons to convey transparency, structure, and engagement. The object reflects an enjoyable and welcoming school setting with an open system for parental involvement. The interpretant suggests that children will feel happy and comfortable during the trial class, and parents will have the opportunity to assess teaching quality and classroom atmosphere directly. Based on the questionnaire distributed to 10 parents, the majority of respondents were housewives and working parents, with most of them aged 30 years and above (70%), 80% of respondents strongly agreed that it is essential for holistic child development. About 65% agreed that early education prepares children better for formal schooling, while 70% believed that it helps form positive character and habits. Furthermore, 75% strongly agreed that teachers play a crucial role in shaping children’s personalities.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In summary, while their representamen (signs) different, ranging from emotional human connection (Sekolah Cikal), digital literacy and reflection (Kalananti), to cognitive training and measurable progress (Sempoa SIP) to a cheerful and engaging learning environment with clear communication (Starland School). All four advertisements share a common interpretant: the importance of preparing children for the future with the help of trusted educational partners. The core approach across all these campaigns centers on parental involvement, confidence-building, and future-readiness, revealing how educational advertising now moves toward more holistic, personalized, and aspirational narratives. This aligns closely with Rasmani (2021) findings, which emphasize that advertising management in Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a crucial role in encouraging parents to enroll their children in educational institutions. Her review further highlights a growing market demand for ECE services, indicating a high level of parental awareness regarding the value of early education.

Through the semiotic approach of Charles Sanders Peirce, the four educational institutions—Sekolah Cikal, Kalananti, Sempoa SIP, and Starland School have utilized strong representamen in the form of bright visuals, technological symbols, cartoon characters, and engaging educational activities. The object referred to by each advertisement is the unique strengths of each institution, ranging from character education and digital readiness to cognitive development in early childhood. The interpretant, or the meaning formed in the minds of the audience (parents), is that these schools are not only offering education, but also holistic solutions for their children's future. In terms of recommendations for future research, the researcher may suggest using discourse analysis to examine the language, symbols, and narratives used in educational advertisements. This approach could help identify underlying ideological messages or power dynamics in how schools position themselves as solutions for children's future, especially in terms of socio-economic status, intelligence, and success.

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