

# *Text of Dove Chocolate Commercial: A Semiology Study of Roland Barthes*

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**Abstract:** Most chocolate commercials offer various implicit concepts such as love, sweetness, enjoyment, relaxation, and happiness. These concepts are a series of mythic buildings articulated in the advertisement to cover up chocolate’s disadvantages, such as making people obese and increasing the number of cariogenic bacteria. Therefore, advertisement is a method to hide products’ demerits while enlarging their merits. This article attempts to analyze a Dove chocolate commercial by using Roland Barthes’ semiology approach. Thus, the use of this approach can show the myths built through the signifier and the signified in this commercial and it also reveals how the symbol of the Dove chocolate commercial affects customers.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Nature of the Sign According to Roland Barthes

Roland Barth believes that any semiotics should start from the relationship between two terms –signifier and signified. The signifier refers to a variety of material carriers, including sound, text, image, etc., in which the symbol directly stimulates people's senses. While the signified refers to the meaning behind the symbol as a material carrier, which is created by the audience psychologically<sup>[1]</sup>. In the process of symbols’ generation and transfer, various myths ultimately appear everywhere in our daily life.

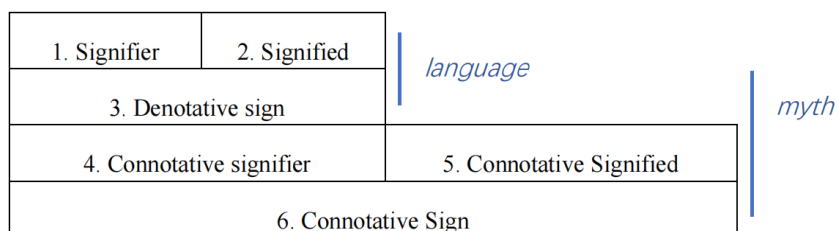


Figure 1: Roland Barthes’ Sign Map Source: Paul Cobley & Litza Jansz (1999). *Introducing Semiotics*. NY: Totem Books, p. 51.

According to Roland Barth, myth aims to clothe the bourgeois' intention with natural rationality, and what is behind the myth is the ideology representing the purpose and interests of the bourgeois who attempts to declare their own ideology as the general ideology. Roland Barthes’ sign map is

shown in Figure 1.

Barthes thinks that in a capitalist society, the bourgeois builds many myths through mass culture. The formation of myths needs to be explained through two levels, including language level and myth level.

In the first level, namely the language level, people conceptualize objects by matching the utterance of the object's name with the object itself. Here, the denotative sign is the object, and it consists of a signifier and its signified, namely the utterance of the object's name and the entity of the object. Moreover, in the second level, the object not only has its own concept but also has an extended meaning. Here, the object is a connotative sign consisting of a connotative signified and a connotative signifier, namely a denotative sign.

Barthes also thinks that "It is a duplicity which is peculiar to bourgeois art: between the intellectual and the visceral sign is hypocritically inserted a hybrid, at once elliptical and pretentious, which is pompously christened 'nature'." [2].

In the past, myths came from churches and religious communities. While in modern society, myths exist in advertising, movies, television, and other media. This article selects one of Dove's chocolate commercials as the object and attempts to analyze it through Roland Barthes' theory.

## 1.2 The Nature of Commercial

Commercials have a persuasive nature that it aims to stimulate consumers' passion for shopping, as a result of which, commercials play a very important role in publicizing products and enhancing brand awareness in today's society [3]. To create an excellent advertisement, commercial designers usually take advantage of various methods, such as metaphor, contrast, exaggeration, and metonymy. By comprehensively using these methods, designers show colorful and fascinating commercials to consumers.

Nowadays, most enterprises would spend plenty of money on commercials. According to Dentsu, the biggest advertising company in the world, global advertising spending would grow 9.2% in 2022, with the advertising market reaching \$745 billion, which would be \$117.2 billion higher than pre-pandemic spending levels in 2019. Moreover, according to another research, when enterprises stop advertising for a year or more, sales volume typically declines year-over-year (on average, 16% after one year and 25% after two) [4]. Advertising has been necessary to keep a brand vigorous and help enterprises to earn profits.

Therefore, commercials have been one of the most common ways to build myths and provide consumers with the imagination of the products. Thus, there is a need to study and analyze those commercials in Barthes' approach to understand how those signs work with meanings behind them and this article would analyze myths in a Dove chocolate commercial.

In the following parts, this article begins the journey of analyzing myths by retrospectively on the brand value of Dove. It will look also, at the love story of Dove. Then it specifically reveals the myths in the Dove chocolate commercial through visual signs and auditory signs. Finally, it discusses the fact that our life is full of myths.

## 2. Body

### 2.1 Brand Concept of Dove

The famous chocolate brand, Dove, all started with Leo Stefanos, the Greek-American founder who opened Dove Candies & Ice Cream on a Chicago street corner. The name of the brand Dove is just from the original shop "Dove Candies & Ice Cream". However, with the marketing strategy, this brand has made people believe that it owns an impressive love story behind it.

The love story goes as follows: a princess fell in love with a cook, however, both of them didn't tell the other. When the cook wanted to show his love to the princess, he gave her ice cream with "Dove", which meant "Do you love me" to her. Unfortunately, these letters were made with hot chocolate and they had thawed before the princess ate the ice cream. Therefore, the cook and the princess missed each other. Years later, when they were old, they met. The cook realized the princess hadn't seen those letters, which led to a bad ending for them. As a result, the cook decided to create solid chocolate with the letter "Dove" in memory of his regretful love.

Convinced of such an impressive love story, consumers, especially the young, have held a firm belief that Dove means "Do you love me?" When young people send Dove chocolate to girlfriends or boyfriends, it expresses implicitly that "Do you love me?"

## 2.2 The Application of Barthes Semiological Approach in Commercial Study

Dove has had a series of advertisements, and this article chooses the one acted by Angelababy and Li Yifeng, two famous entertainment stars in China. Usually, in an advertisement, many signs are included to construct a specific scene.

To analyze the signs in this Dove chocolate commercial systematically, this article divides the signs into two sections: visual signs and auditory signs. The former consists of composition, color, figure, and scene while the latter is combined with background music, human voice and sounds with special effects. The mind map based on the two classifications is shown in Figure 2.

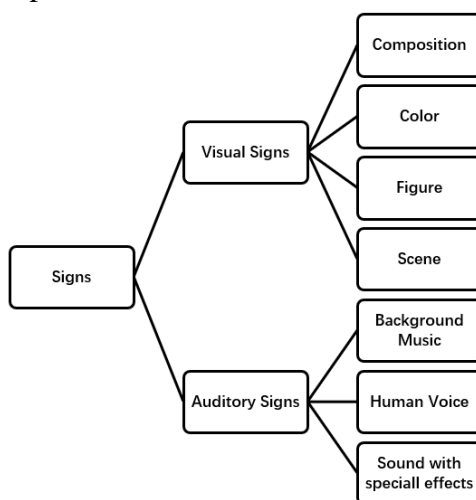


Figure 2: Category of signs in Dove chocolate commercial

### 2.2.1 Visual Sign

Firstly, composition, one of the most important influential factors among virtual signs, determines the overall visual angle of the picture, which is equivalent to the "syntax" in symbolic statements<sup>[5]</sup>. Different forms of composition will influence the audience to interpret the advertising text in a quite different way. The center composition is the most stable composition form, which makes the audience feel balanced and symmetrical, and unconsciously focuses on the center of the picture. In this Dove chocolate commercial, the first picture uses the center composition. Therefore, when the audience sees it, they would see a bench, a handsome man, and a beautiful woman in the center. Next, their eyes would follow them unconsciously to find out what would happen next. And this is the start of their involvement in the commercial.

Secondly, as one of the elements of the art design, color is also a visual symbol. The color itself has no meaning, but when it is used in advertising design, different colors can symbolize different

meanings and emotions<sup>[6]</sup>. According to research, the young prefer blue, red, green, and colors in high contrast and women tend to red, pink, and other colors to symbolize gentleness and romance. In the Dove chocolate commercial, the handsome actor, Li Yifeng, wears a grey sweater, a white shirt, and a pair of grey trousers, at the same time, the beautiful actress, Angelababy, wears a pure pink dress. When Angelababy eats a piece of Dove chocolate, the grey winter becomes a pink spring instantly. Such color arrangement is designed for Dove’s target consumers who are middle-income women in cities from sixteen to forty because they are who prefer pink very much.

Thirdly, there are four standards to choose suitable brand spokesmen, including appropriate brand value, product performance, target consumers, and brand style<sup>[7]</sup>. In the advertisement, Dove chooses Li Yifeng, and Angelababy, two very popular stars in China, to film the commercial. Moreover, these two people are quite young, energetic good-looking. This advertisement makes full use of their advantages to suggest that if consumers eat Dove chocolate, they would be as beautiful as Angelababy or they would meet a handsome boy.

Finally, through showing a true scenario, Barthes thinks that “the advertisement involves the consumer in a kind of direct experience of the substance, make him the accomplice of a liberation rather than the mere beneficiary of a result; matter here is endowed with value-bearing states.”<sup>[4]</sup> There are some noticeable scenes in this commercial, such as a music box, a brown silk ribbon, a riband made of chocolate, ice, many small flowers, and so on, and Figure 3 would explain the signified based on the signifier in the advertisement.

First, the story of the advertisement happens in the music box, which is a specific visual angle. In fact, in Chinese opinion, especially for girls, a music box is usually a symbol of love. Using a music box builds a romantic atmosphere for the story. Second, alongside the actress, there is a brown silk ribbon on the bench with Dove chocolate on it. When the actress eats Dove chocolate, a long riband made of chocolate gradually surrounds her. Commonly, silk is quite smooth, so it shows that Dove is as smooth as silk which is consistent with the description “silky Dove”. Also, the actress is eating, and the bench quickly inclines toward her, leading the actor to slide toward her. Moreover, the whole image rotates quickly after the actress eats a piece of Dove chocolate. These are the symbols of Dove chocolate's smoothness. Finally, the moment the audience sees this advertisement, they see ice winter first, and the picture is grey and full of ice. Later it changes to a warm spring filled with blooming flowers and new green shoots. Such artful changes confirm that Dove chocolate, which makes grey winter turn to pink spring, is the embodiment of love and romance.

Analysis of the Dove chocolate commercial		
	Signifier	Signified
Visual signs	Composition: center composition	draw the audience's attention
	Color: mainly pink	sweetness, love
	Figure: Li Yifeng and Angelababy	sweetness, handsomeness, beauty
	Scene: a music box	sweetness, love
	Scene: grey winter → pink spring	sweetness, love
	Scene: a brown silk ribbon	silky Dove chocolate
	Scene: image rotation	
	Scene: silk made of Dove chocolate	

Figure 3: Analysis of Dove chocolate commercial (visual signs)

### 2.2.2 Auditory Sign

In the advertisement, when the music reconciles with the scenery, it can make people more

impressed with the product<sup>[8]</sup>. Moreover, fast-paced music will grab the audience's attention more than music with a slow tempo <sup>[9]</sup>. This Dove advertisement has three main sounds, continuous background music, human voice, and sound effects. First, the background music is rhythmic, lively, and energetic which creates a joyful atmosphere for the love story in the advertisement. Second, after the actor inclines to the actress, she says "is it so smooth?" Here, the advertisement designers use an exaggerated way to show the smoothness of the chocolate. And this sentence is also a pinning here, which not only superficially shows the smoothness of the bench, but more importantly, shows the smoothness of the chocolate. Thirdly, after the actress eats a piece of chocolate, the chocolate beside her becomes a riband made of chocolate, at the same time, there exists a magical sound effect emphasizing the surprise of such a change and also intensifying the miraculous process. Figure 4 is exhibited to show the link between the signifier and the signified in auditory signs.

Analysis of the Dove chocolate commercial		
	Signifier	Signified
Auditory signs	sounds with special effects	silky Dove chocolate
	Human voice	sweetness, love
	Background music: high-paced	

Figure 4: Analysis of Dove chocolate commercial (auditory signs)

### 2.3 Side Effects of Dove Chocolate

In the advertisement, designers rarely show the side effects of the products <sup>[10]</sup>, and neither do Dove chocolate commercials' designers. However, side effects are non-negligible. For instance, the fat rate of Dove chocolate is relatively high. If people eat too much, it will not only cause obesity. But also cause diarrhea, stomach pain, abdominal distension, and other discomforts.

### 3. Conclusion

The signifier has a material nature such as sounds, objects, or images while the signified is the mental representation of things and the outside world which has a psychological and abstract nature.

From the analysis of the Dove chocolate commercial, it's easy to understand that each setting in the advertisement is well-designed, each arrangement has a symbolic meaning, and each layout is to catering the imagination of the consumers. As common consumers, we are interested in the love story and we appreciate brand value. Therefore, we are also likely to be attracted by commodities matching our value.

Myths are built to deceive consumers with promises of pleasure, enjoyment, and self-confidence that are intoxicating and enjoyed by target consumers. Dove is a representative chocolate brand that tries to fit every standard of consumers while hiding its side effects. To conclude, it's necessary to consume rationally and avoid being credulous in advertisements.

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