

Social Stigma of Covid-19: A Semiotic Analysis of WHO Campaign Posters

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has been reported to rise in numbers of infected cases and deaths. The massive report by media and social networks that focus on spreading and infection may affect physical health, individuals' and general populations' mental health, isolation, and stigma. WHO exhibits some anti-stigma campaign posters to eradicate COVID-19-related stigma and discrimination perpetuated by individuals and groups of people. This study employs a qualitative method to acquire a deep investigation of meaning and to involve the social context. Thus, by using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, analysing signifiers and signifieds, this study was aimed to unmask both denotative and connotative meanings of the stigma embed within the five health campaign posters of COVID-19 on the WHO official website. The analysis was focused not only on the verbal sign of posters (linguistic text) but also on their visual sign (imagery messages). The analysis of the two sign systems of posters shows that the five posters connote acts of discriminatory behaviours, stigmatisation, stereotype, and blaming. There were some contradictions in the posters, yet as a whole, the messages are still positive. They encourage people to work together to fight COVID-19 and bring out the best of humanity. To have better awareness and positive attitudes and appeals, governments, citizens, media, key influencers of communities have roles in preventing and stopping the stigma surrounding in South-Asia and specifically in Indonesia, which becomes the target of the poster viewers during the pandemic. Those messages are connoted through different font colours and sizes, and the illustration on each poster

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INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the SARS-CoV-2 virus (known as COVID-19) outbreak as a severe global threat, a pandemic on 11th of March 2020. Since then, COVID-19 has been reported to rise in numbers of infected cases and deaths (WHO, 2020b). This

COVID-19 information is massively reported by media and social networks, especially in the beginning stage of pandemics worldwide. Furthermore, they focus on the spreading and infection, which provoke various responses of attitude and awareness among people. Roy et al. (2020) remark that every pandemic has unique causality and consequence. It may propagate fear and anxiety of the disease's transmission rate, morbidity and mortality (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Logie & Turan, 2020), especially this COVID-19 disease spreading fast. Educated groups of people, such as health professionals, often have better awareness and positive attitudes towards the pandemic and have low anxiety levels (Mishra et al., 2016). An educated group of people also reported having misleading recognition and a negative attitude towards a pandemic (Kang, Ma et al., 2020). A study conducted by Roy et al. (2020) about assessment of the knowledge, attitude, anxiety experience and perceived mental health among educated adults in India during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that approximately 60% of the participants believed that patients recovered from COVID-19 infection should not be allowed to stay within the community. It is also reported that 41.3% of the educated adults have a high level of anxiety if people in their social cycle reported being sick. Another case as the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is that there is manipulation and bias in media reporting COVID-19 in American media to discredit China, blaming the communist party as the cause of the outbreak (AlAfnan, 2020). Additionally, in a study conducted by Reny & Barreto (2020), Trump and his allies in conservative media racialised the coronavirus as Chinese and broadly Asian, which 'activates' anti-Asian attitudes and behaviours in public by US social groups. Unfortunately, these attitudes and behaviours do not appear only in America (AlAfnan, 2020; Lee & Waters, 2021; Reny & Barreto, 2020) but also in almost all Western countries (Roberto et al., 2020; Sorokowski et al., 2020) and in Asian countries (Abdullah, 2020; Ahdab, 2020; Roy et al., 2020), within many aspects such as marginalised population (Kantamneni, 2020) and groups of people, such as health workers (Kang, Li et al., 2020; Kang, Ma et al., 2020), migrants (Devakumar et al., 2020) and travellers and people of Asia descent (Turner-Musa et al., 2020). Those misleading recognition, negative attitude and high level of fear and anxiety further may lead to other psychological consequences such as stigmatisation, discrimination (Reny & Barreto, 2020), loss and exaggerated fear (Kang, Ma et al., 2020) and blaming (AlAfnan, 2020).

In response to those misleading recognition and stigmatisation, the WHO official website exhibits campaign posters to address COVID-19-related stigma and discrimination. This theme was made separately from other health campaign themes on the website, considering that stigmatisation and discrimination are global problems. This is indicated by the high xenophobia cases in the region, contributing to the spread of the COVID-19 (WHO, 2020a).

Posters as Campaign Media

Poster is a graphical expression of pictures and words or only words. It is created on the "basis of design and artistic thinking" (Gökaşan, 2017, p.47). Graphics and pictures in compositions visualise the text as the interaction of verbal and nonverbal messages (Bouzida, 2014; Sifaki & Papadopoulou, 2015). Poster is a means of communication and has been used for various purposes such as to inform people, persuade them, change their thoughts, and mobilise them. Posters used in campaigns with social content are meant to make the readers make evaluations in their minds.

According to Gökaşan (2017), posters are divided into categories, such as politics, social, commercial, and cultural. In health, posters are used to spread knowledge, appeal to people's awareness, and change people's ways of thinking and behaving as messages in health campaign posters conveyed. Some studies discovered posters as an effective media in health campaigns to appeal to people's awareness and influence positive behaviours (Hermina & Prihatini, 2016; Zulfa & Kusuma, 2020). Zulfa & Kusuma (2020), for example, besides increasing peoples' knowledge of COVID-19 and its incubation period, poster as media campaign successfully change behaviour towards physical distancing during COVID-19 pandemic and other behaviour to avoid the spread of COVID-19 such as washing hands using soap and water, wearing a mask and use hand sanitiser. Another study showing the effectiveness of health campaign posters is a study on family nutritional awareness (Kadazri) by Hermina & Prihatini (2016). The study involved adolescents from three provinces in Indonesia, West Java, West Sumatra and East Kalimantan. The key finding of their study is that the effectiveness of posters in influencing adolescents' behaviour was because the posters were made and intended for a particular target group (adolescents). Therefore, considering and paying more attention to the characteristics and emotional response of the target group into the campaign material made posters to change the target group's behaviour successfully (Hermina & Prihatini, 2016; Johnny & Mitchell, 2006).

Health campaign posters have commonly been used in stigma and discrimination among peoples infected by some diseases, such as HIV/AIDS (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006), Ebola virus (Onwuekwe, 2018), and other contagious diseases. Health campaign posters meant anti-stigma and discrimination efforts were reflected in the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Johnny & Mitchell (2006) reported that visual materials used in those posters work against their goals by reinforcing and producing new forms of stigma and discrimination. The visual and textual aspects of the poster's text contain messages to discredit the main characters' actions by urging the audience to fight their acts of ignorance and injustice. Johnny & Mitchell (2006) attempted to understand campaigns from the perspective of their intended audiences.

Semiotics and Posters

Semiotics synonymous with semiology was first defined by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure as 'the science of signs' (Allen, 2004; Ashwin, 1984; Bouzida, 2014; Nöth, 2011). Semiotics, the science of sign, emerged as an area of theoretical inquiry after World War I (Ashwin, 1984). Semiotics studied in the specific context of sign used are called Applied Semiotics (Nöth, 2011). In the development, semiotics also becomes an intellectual groundwork for developing a drawing theory as a visual study (Ashwin, 1984). The visual study includes the domain study of posters, design, pictures, drawings, paintings, photographs, colours, print ads, films, diagrams, traffic signs and maps.

Semiotic analysis is one of the most commonly used methods to reveal the meanings built on posters. Posters are considered a sign since, in posters (as well as an advertisement), the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional, and specific attributes of the image presumably form the signifieds of the poster messages. These signifieds have to be transmitted clearly (Barthes, 1977) to be called effective. Furthermore, Roland Barthes proclaimed that semiotics aims to take in any system of signs whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects (Barthes, 1967).

Roland Barthes's semiotic theory and approach were influenced by *semiology*, the general science of signs, by Saussure. The sign is involved in a three-dimension relationship (Barthes, 1977; Johann, Groß, Messig, & Rusk, 2020; Monticelli, 2016). A sign includes the relationships drawn between a signifier (a sound/mark) and signified (a concept) (Allen, 2004; Ashwin, 1984). In other words, the sign is the product of an act that binds the signifier and the signified (Allen, 2004). Denotation is produced in the first layer of signification, which plays on literal, immediate and present meaning called a *first-order system* or *first-order signification*. At the same time, connotation extends this existent sign and turns the sign into a signifier for a new signified, or a new concept (Barthes, 1972) called *second-order signification* (Allen, 2004). Thus Connotation is closely related to the culture whose interpretation may vary from person to person (Çakı, C., & Gazi, 2018).

In the poster, the linguistic sign which accompanies an image or images could not be separately read in their own right because they derive their meaning from the image and vice versa (Ashwin, 1984; Barthes, 1967, 1977; Dallyono & Sukyadi, 2019; Sifaki & Papadopoulou, 2015). Sifaki & Papadopoulou (2015) add that rather than duplicating meaning, both the signs and poster co-exist in a complementary relationship that makes linguistic and image signs in a poster are considered a whole. Thus, to provide semiotic understanding through denotation and connotation meaning in five campaign posters exhibited on the WHO Official Website, this study focuses not only on the linguistic sign of posters (text) but also on their image sign (illustration).

A study of anti-stigma campaign posters exhibited on the WHO Official Website is salient because WHO is an international health organisation which in its campaign, the target is not limited to a particular region. Similar to UNAID's campaign posters aimed to create a consolidated international response and to raise global consciousness about HIV/AIDS-stigma and discrimination issues (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006), the campaign posters exhibited on the WHO Official Website are expected to be relevant for all cultures, age groups, gender and socioeconomic contexts. Although there has been a study on assessing posters as a media campaign to persuade the behaviour and attitude of people to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Zulfa & Kusuma, 2020), a study is questioning how messages conveyed by posters exhibited in an international organisation such as WHO which directly target stigma issue and maybe read and understood by difference audience becomes salient. Driven by that salience, this study was conducted to deconstruct the textual (linguistic sign) and visual materials (image sign) of the posters by exploring their denotative and connotative properties. This aims to gain both their direct meaning and the underlying assumption they possess, which can influence the target's understanding of messages regarding COVID-19-related stigma.

METHODS

The research method employed in this study was the descriptive qualitative method. The descriptive qualitative method places the stress and describes a certain phenomenon through textual analysis and interpretation rather than comparing the effects of a particular treatment (Creswell, 2014). This method fits with the purpose of the study to provide a semiotic understanding of how the cultural messages that shape stigma associated with Corona Virus

Disease 2019 (COVID-19) are embedded within the health campaign posters of COVID-19 by Southeast Asia WHO.

To meet the purpose of the study, as a semiotic study, the study was under the umbrella of Roland Barthes's semiotic approach (1977), specifically his conception of the rhetoric image to uncover the messages asserted by the certain actors which are meant to influence the way individual or group sees themselves and others especially to demystify the stigma constructed among people during the outbreak of COVID-19.

The data of this study were five health campaign posters exhibited in the WHO Official Website about the stigma associated with COVID-19. The posters were taken from the Official Website of WHO (<https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/infographics>). The posters were exhibited on the page *infographics of Novel Coronavirus* under the title *stigma* on the website's page. Therefore, they are accessible on the WHO website to be checked for the validation of data. All of the posters exhibited under the title *stigma* on the web page of Novel Coronavirus were selected.

In analysing data, by applying Roland Barthes's method, dichotomy interpretation, the analysis of this study focused on denotative and connotative aspects and their relation to the poster elements system as the interaction of various symbols with the imagery to produce messages that appeal to self-awareness of anti-stigma appear since the pandemic of COVID-19 in Indonesia.

Barthes views images as a sign that serves as a culturally specific referent with denotative and connotative messages (Barthes, 1967). The denotative meaning might be the signifier that signifies a new concept conveyed through the use of both image and language (Hasyim, 2014). The analysis of each poster used Barthes's perspective and method to focus on signifiers, including the imagery or illustration and written language in the campaign posters, which connote cultural messages about stigma built among the people during the pandemic COVID-19. Barthes views signs (particularly images). This was aimed to unmask denotative and connotative meanings of the stigma embed in the WHO COVID-19 health campaign posters.

Considering Barthes's *The Rhetoric Image* (1977), the analysis was conducted through suggested steps as follows:

1. Divide each poster into two major sign systems: image and the linguistic sign.
2. Interpret each sign system of the posters by identifying the signifier and signifying to get denotation meaning (first-order signification).
3. Take over the sign or the order of the denotation message to make them new signifiers.
4. Analyse the new signified (concepts) by considering the literal message (from the linguistic sign) as a support for the 'symbolic' message (from image sign), then interpret them by using a little inversion of the cultural and literal message.

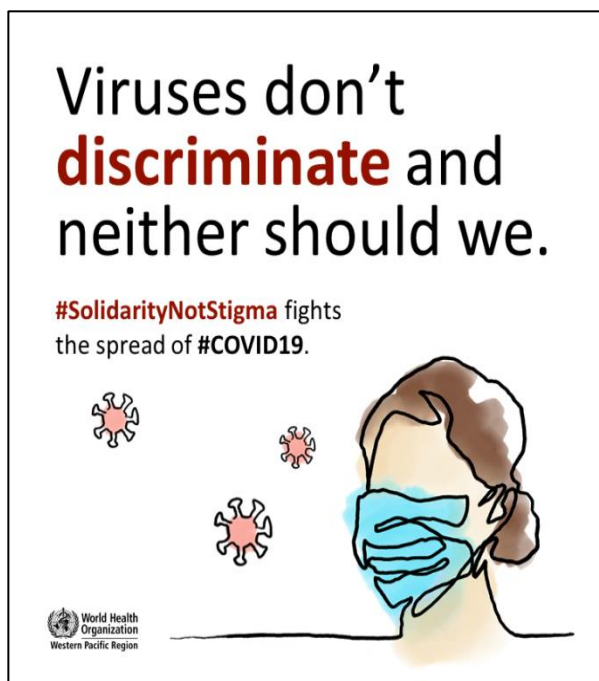
According to Barthes (1967, 1977) and the summarise of other studies on analysing denotative and connotative meaning from visual media, such as memes (Haq & Nugraha, 2020), advertisement (Sidauruk et al., 2019) and posters (Bouzida, 2014; Çakı, C., & Gazi, 2018; Gökaşan, 2017; Sifaki & Papadopoulou, 2015), the analysing of signifier and signified should

consider the nature of them as the element of semiology. Therefore, the following is an elaboration of the semiology elements according to those studies.

1. Signifier. Signifier has a material nature. Whether sounds, objects, or images also, it is impossible to separate it from the signified, which means the signifier-signified relationship is associative.
2. Signified. Signified is the mental representation of things (signifier) and the outside world; it has a psychological and abstract nature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the study was procured from the analysis of each poster in terms of their two sign system of poster, image and linguistic sign to get their denotative and connotative meanings. In addition, the analysis of each poster is presented to get a cultural message conveyed in each



poster.

Picture 1: Poster 1

Source: <https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/infographics>

Poster 1 contains both linguistic signs and image signs. There are two linguistic signs which are the main text of the poster "Viruses don't discriminate and neither should we" and the tagline of the poster " , #SolidarityNotStigma fight the spread of #COVID19". The main text is placed on top of the image sign and the tagline. It also consumes a larger space of the poster, among other signs, including the tagline. The word "discriminate" is in red while the rest words are in black. This presentation of linguistic signs signifies the literal meaning of the sentence "Viruses don't discriminate and neither should we" as the main message of the poster. However, it was not clear enough until the image sign illustrated a person using a mask and coronavirus around the person.

The illustration of a person without face illustration is the signifier for the concept of an unknown person from the image sign. It denotes the meaning that the person might be a woman or man. Another signifier is the same person illustration using a mask, and the viruses floating around the person signify protecting from a virus. Therefore, the denotation meaning resulting from the image sign is that the person (whether a man or woman) protects him/herself from the virus (COVID-19).

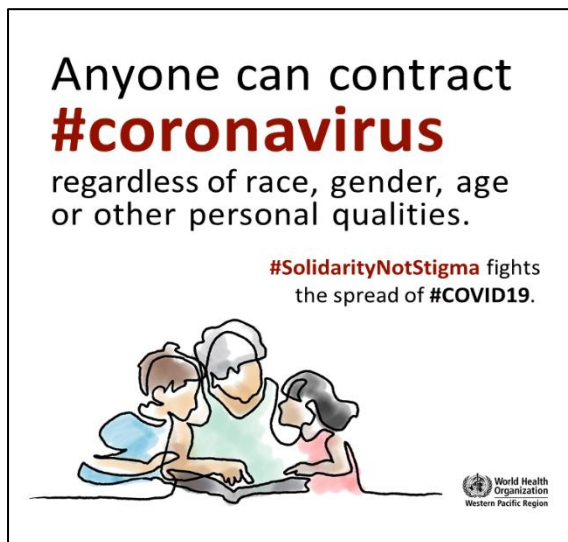
The denotation meaning supported by the linguistic meaning connotes that viruses that are not human beings are attributed to human behaviour: “discriminate”. However, there is no image for the illustration of humans who does not discriminate. The way text presented to the image or illustration highly make connotation meaning (Barthes, 1977) because there is a presupposition meaning being new signified for new meaning. It connotes the meaning that the coronavirus does not distinguish people to infect, but people behave so as indicated by the word “neither should we”. Thus, the connotation meaning of the poster is that people do what the coronavirus does not “discriminate” each other during the pandemic of COVID-19 (Roy et al., 2020; WHO, 2020a). WHO (2020a) reports some discriminatory behaviours against people of specific ethnic backgrounds and anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus. As a result, this condition becomes an alert in the poster in which the word “discriminate” is in red. As Darmaprawira W.A (2002) asserts, red colour impresses negative emotions such as aggressive, anger and danger and symbol of love, strength, and bravery. The red colour in the word “discriminate” amplifies the negativity on that behaviour.

On the other hand, the red colour connotes different emotions in the hashtag “#SolidarityNotStigma”. In Indonesian context, red is psychologically also associated closely with high spirit disposition, victory and success (Krisnawati, 2005; Raharjo, 2019). In this sense, the hashtag “#SolidarityNotStigma” connotes the spirit on how to ‘win’ against the virus. The last, the background is white, which is believed as a symbol of clarity. It makes all of the messages from linguistic, and image signs are projected vividly.

Picture 2 shows the second anti-stigma campaign poster exhibited on The WHO Official Website. Similar the *Picture 1*, this poster contains one main text and even the same tagline, “#SolidarityNotStigma fight the spread of #COVID19”. However, the main text is presented with two different font sizes, which are bigger than the tagline. The biggest text is the clause “Anyone can contract #coronavirus”. It signifies the literal meaning of the clause that coronavirus infects everyone. In addition, the less size text, “regardless of race, gender, age or other personal qualities”, gives an additional signifier to the message that COVID-19 can infect everyone with no exception. Another linguistic sign is the tagline which is the same as the previous poster. The signifier is written text of “#SolidarityNotStigma fights the spread of #COVID19” place below the main text and above the image which the colour of “#SolidarityNotStigma” is *marsala* (deep reddish-brown). It signifies the tagline of the anti-stigma campaign poster.

The illustration of three people depicts one adult reading a book with a boy and a girl together without wearing a mask, as illustrated by the first poster. The colour of the hair and the clothes worn are various. The illustration signifies the concept of variation and togetherness. This portrayal denotes various ages, gender, and race of people reading a book together.

The denotation meaning of the tagline which supports the main message of the poster can lead to a connotation meaning. Hashtag on the tagline signifies a system of microblogging platform such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Youtube. Hashtag is a classification system to encourage the spreadability of ideas and topics and it also allows those posts containing hashtag to be searched by other users (Warf, 2018). The use of hashtag instead of plain tagline in the posters connotes that the idea on the poster is expected to spread around all over the social media platforms supporting hashtag. According to the analysis above, Poster 2 is also meant to fight the stigma and discrimination which needs highly attention by WHO to spread among the people. WHO expects the campaign of #SolidarityNotStigma could combat



the stigma perpetuated among people (WHO, 2020a, 2020b).

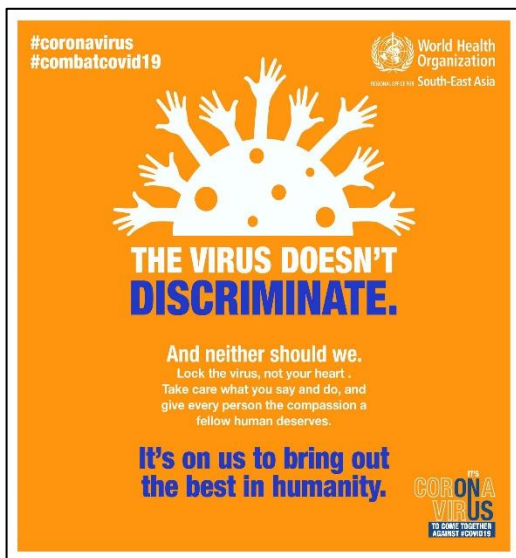
Picture 2: Poster 2

Source: <https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/infographics>

Another connotation meaning is constructed from the colour of the text. In Indonesia, the red shape type of the words “#coronavirus” and “#SolidarityNotStigma” is known as *Merah*, which has meaning as a symbol of aggressiveness, danger, brave, anger (Darmaprawira W.A, 2002; Krisnawati, 2005). It indicates the connotation meaning of coronavirus as an aggressive virus that can infect people rapidly, and it connotes to important alert of danger to be avoided. The illustration of three people, in addition, signified by people of various genders and ages gathering closely reading a book, connotes a situation with a family member (parent and kids). This creates a meaning of “closest people around us”. Integrated with the text “anyone can contract #coronavirus” and the colour of “#coronavirus”, this poster gives an alert of #coronavirus danger towards everyone’s closest people so that people should protect them. Contradictory with the message conveyed, the people in the illustration are not wearing a mask. This illustration may invoke a confusing and contradictory message concerning the message conveyed by the first poster to protect ourselves from the virus by wearing a mask. The message connoted from the illustration is also not consistent with other WHO campaigns of physical distancing to limit the potential spread of the virus (WHO, 2020c).

Like the first poster, the linguistic sign in Poster 3 also contains “THE VIRUS DOESN’T DISCRIMINATE” as the biggest and the main text on the poster. Unlike the other words whose colour is white, the word “DISCRIMINATE” is *cerulean* (blue). Another text in blue is “It is on us to bring out the best in humanity.”. Both texts in blue correlate each other to an antagonistic signified. “DISCRIMINATE” is associated with negative human behaviour, while “It is on us to bring out the best in humanity.” signify compassion, sympathy, or the quality of being human. In addition, although the smaller text of “And neither should we” is in white, it also signifies the same signified, which connote the same meaning as the two texts in blue.

The main image sign in the poster is an illustration of a half-coronavirus-like image in white colour, which has modification by changing its spike glycoprotein with human hands. This is the signifier for the signified of “coronavirus with human rising hand”. Another image sign is the logo of WHO at the bottom of the poster. The logo contains both symbol of the WHO organisation and written text “REGIONAL OFFICE FOR SOUTH-EAST ASIA”, which denote the poster creator's identity.



Picture 3: Poster 3

Source: <https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/infographics>

The connotation meaning from the denotation meaning of the linguistic and image signs is quite similar to Poster 1. Firstly, the linguistic message of “THE VIRUS DOESN’T DISCRIMINATE” fixes the possible floating chain of the signified from the image of coronavirus modified spike by human raising hands that are different in sizes. Furthermore, a half-coronavirus-like image with some different sizes of rising human hands modifying the virus’ spikes indicates that the virus has left many victims in various age groups. Thus, its function is amplifying the concept of coronavirus infecting many people without exception. The word “should” in the text of “And neither should we”, on the other hand, connotes a meaning as a challenge for a human being (*we*) to ‘behave’ as well as the virus behave: not to discriminate.

As shown in Picture 4, the poster has several linguistic and image signs. Different from the tagline of the two previous posters, the hashtags are placed above the signs written as “#coronavirus” and “combatcovid19”. The main text is also presented in some different font

sizes. The biggest text, which is in the form of a question “WHAT IF THERE WAS NO ONE TO CARE FOR YOU?”, is in white as small as a text of “Covid-19 can affect any of us. Moreover, if it does, it is our healthcare heroes who heal us. They risk their lives to protect us”. The yellow (mimosa) text “Think about it” appears between the two texts. Like the text “Think about it”, the text of “It’s on us to respect and protect our healthcare workers” is written in mimosa. The use of colours, particularly yellow, expresses and intends to increase the reader’s attention span by more than 80% than using mono-colour (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002). Furthermore, for any cultural purpose, yellow particularly means attracting attention and giving an alert about any danger ahead and yellow in traffic signs for the caution sign. In Indonesia, particularly,



Picture 4: Poster 4

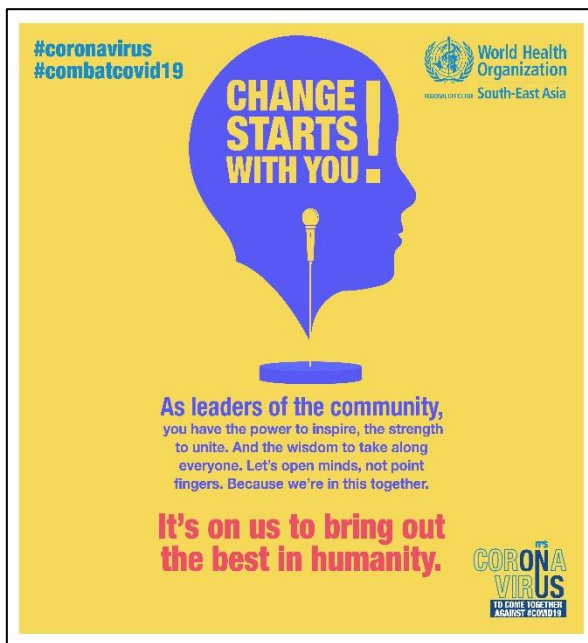
Source: <https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/infographics>

The white colour connotes purity or life (Caivano, 1998). The text in the form of a question coloured white has a meaning of the pure question posed to the readers. Meanwhile, yellow or mimosa in the texts “Think about it.” and “It is on us to respect and protect our healthcare workers” connotes not only to precaution (Caivano, 1998) in which after reading it the people can notice the messages and significantly influence their minds to decide specific things, mimosa also evokes the emotion of *hope* and *reassurance* (Kress & VanLeeuwen, 2002).

The image sign is a health worker-like illustration with a half green-white skin colour and a shade in his/her green side. The health worker illustrated is wearing white clothes, slinging a stethoscope in the neck and wearing a mask but without a face. It signifies that the gender of the health worker can be either man or woman. These denotations combined with the linguistic messages emphasise several connotation meanings. First is the illustration of health workers whose colour skin signified life and purity. Second, together with the linguistic messages, it connotes the concern of health worker sacrifice (as connoted by the word “hero” and the colour skin) for protecting us from COVID-19 and caring for everyone infected by the virus. Third, the shade on the right side of the health worker implied the risk of his own life in doing so.

However, the text with mimosa colour evokes the possible danger because it also creates a presupposition that ignorance behaviour and disrespectful acts towards health workers drive confusion, anxiety, and fear (WHO, 2020a).

Linguistic and image sign on Poster 5 are dominated by mimosa color (yellow). Linguistic signs on the poster have different sizes. The biggest text is “CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU!” placed on the center of human head illustration. The text is a signifier for its literal meaning. The smaller linguistic sign is “It’s on us to respect and protect our healthcare workers”, a text which always appears in the posters made by South-east Asia WHO. Another linguistic sign is “As a leaders of the community,” followed by smaller size but longer clause “you have the power to inspire, the strength to unite. And the wisdom to take along everyone. Let’s open minds, not point fingers. Because we’re in this together.” Those texts are the signifier for the concept on explicit meaning of their literal meaning.



Picture 5: Poster 5

Source: <https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/infographics>

The image signs illustrate the human bald head in which there is a standing microphone, and the text “CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU!”. The microphone is below the text. The illustration of a bald head is the signifier for the signified of man or woman, and the illustration of a microphone is a signifier for *speak* or *speech*.

The linguistic and image messages create a connotative meaning. *Speak*, or *Speech* signifies to a person who has influence or power. It connotes to a leader, and so does the illustration of a bald human head is connoting to a leader. WHO (2020a) appeals to governments, citizens, media, key influencers of communities to have a role in preventing and stopping the stigma surrounding Chinese people, and generally in South Asia. The text “CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU!” on the head illustration and above the microphone connote the meaning to appeal the leader make changes, and one of the ways is through being thoughtful in communicating in media showing supportive behaviours towards COVID-19.

The last connotative meaning is gained through the denotative meaning of hashtag #combatcovid19 which exists in all posters. The hashtag denotes the act of fighting against the disease of coronavirus. Furthermore, the word combat signifies the signified of “in battle” in this hashtag is a military metaphor that places COVID as the target or enemy to fight. This signified the concept body as a battlefield in which we combat the virus there. The connotation of this is that we need to strengthen weapons (immune system) to counter the virus “attack” (Logie & Turan, 2020).

The messages concluded in this poster are that WHO engages leaders of community, influencers, media, and people to fight against stigma, discrimination, and other negative attitudes towards this COVID-19 Pandemic.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to provide semiotic understanding through denotation and connotation meaning in five campaign posters exhibited on the WHO Official Website. Through the analysis of linguistic and image sign systems, both denotative and connotative are constructed, and the posters convey the cultural messages. The cultural messages connoted in the posters are discrimination, stigma or negative assumption, disrespectful acts towards health workers, people infected by COVID-19 and their caregivers. Instead of discriminatory behaviours, stigmatisation, stereotyping, and blaming during the pandemic, working together to fight COVID-19 and bring out the best humanity such as compassionate and sympathetic is the right way to pass through this pandemic. Those messages are connoted through different font colours and sizes and the illustration on each poster. On the other hand, there are found incongruence that evokes confusion and contradiction messages among the five posters, such as the illustration of a close distance among people without wearing masks in Poster 2, which contradict the message conveyed by Poster 2.

A key point from the result is that the posters are seen to elucidate the misleading recognition and behaviours that emerge during the pandemic. Through the posters, which appeals to governments, citizens, media, and key influencers of communities to prevent and stop the stigma surrounding South-Asia and Indonesia, which becomes the target of the poster viewers. WHO also conveys the importance of being solid to fight the pandemic since the danger of COVID-19 is real and should not make people lose their humanity to face this pandemic.

Drawing upon analysis of linguistic and image signs in deconstructing denotative and connotative meaning on posters, this study provides an evaluative result that could contribute to the arrangement of health campaign posters materials that precisely meet the expectation to promote outlined in health campaign target. Although semiotic analysis of the campaign posters exhibited in the WHO Official Website has revealed the messages conveyed, there is a need for further studies integrating other fields of study such as visual communication, resulting in some deeper analyses.

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