



Analysis of Human Rights-Themed Posters Using a Semiotic Approach: A Review of the TRPOSTER Exhibition

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Abstract

Throughout human history, the search for meaning has determined the forms of communication established by individuals with their environment. In this context, semiotics is an important branch of science that analyzes messages conveyed through written and visual signs and reveals the hidden and implicit layers of meaning behind design. The transmission and interpretation of cultural themes in social life influence how messages are perceived, and this can vary among individuals. This study examines five human rights-themed posters selected from the TRPOSTER platform within the framework of Ferdinand de Saussure's concepts of "sign," "signifier," and "signified" and Roland Barthes' approaches to "denotation" and "connotation" using qualitative research methods. The main objective of the research is to evaluate the visual and written elements in the posters within their social and cultural contexts to reveal the layers of meaning behind the messages conveyed. The study contributes to the literature by examining the semiotic dimensions of posters aimed at raising public awareness in the field of graphic design. The findings reveal that graphic design functions as a universal and powerful means of communication through symbolic signs.

Keywords: Semiotics, TRPOSTER, Human Rights, Graphic Design, Poster

Introduction

The origins of poster design date back to ancient civilizations. The first examples can be seen on clay tablets written in cuneiform script in Assyrian trading colonies in 4000 BC. These tablets served not only as commercial announcements but also as cultural and social communication tools of the period (Tepecik, 2002:12). The modern use of posters is believed to have begun in 15th-century France. Posters used by churches to announce their fundraising activities to the public marked an important turning point in the history of graphic design, as they were the first examples of posters being used in a corporate and public communication context. Artists such as Jules Chéret and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec made significant contributions to the development of contemporary poster design. Art movements such as Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and Bauhaus helped posters gain an artistic identity (Lehimler, 2018).

Graphic design, as one of the cornerstones of visual communication, is the art of visual arrangement that enables messages to be conveyed effectively to the target audience. In this context, posters are powerful communication tools that aim to convey messages about products, services, events, or social issues to a wide audience (Becer, 1997:201). Visual designs are not only aesthetically valuable, but also important cultural indicators that shape the ways in which societies express themselves, convey information, and communicate. Visual images reveal the transformative power of graphic design with their potential to shape individuals' thought structures and social perceptions (Tarlakazan &

Tarlakazan, 2024). For this reason, poster designs, especially those with social content, are considered strategic tools that highlight social issues, raise awareness, and encourage behavioral change.

Human rights are of critical importance in terms of protecting universal values and ensuring social justice. Communicating these rights through visual communication is an effective method for raising awareness and bringing about behavioral change in society. In this context, posters are an important graphic design product that can convey the message directly and strikingly. Semiotics provides a powerful tool for analyzing how the visual and textual elements used in posters are interpreted and what impact they have on the target audience (Bürge, 2020). The concept of human rights has developed over time in line with different societies' quest for freedom, equality, and justice, becoming a universal value. Since the 20th century, especially after World War II, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights announced under the leadership of the United Nations, protecting and spreading these values has become a shared responsibility for all societies around the world. In this context, it can be said that art and design, especially poster design, play an important role as a means of communication in making human rights visible. The TRPOSTER International Poster Exhibition, which is the focus of this study, aims to create a collective consciousness about individual rights and freedoms through posters on the theme of human rights. The posters in the exhibition contain both formal elements of graphic design and cultural codes, social messages, and political references. Therefore, the analysis of these posters is not limited to visual aesthetics but also requires an in-depth examination of their layers of meaning. At this point, the semiotic analysis method provides an important theoretical tool. Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation enable the decoding of the multi-layered meanings contained in the images, symbols, and typography of the posters. This study aims to examine human rights-themed posters in line with Barthes' semiotic approach, thereby seeking to reveal the cultural, social, and ideological messages conveyed through the visual signs present in these posters.

1. About the TRPOSTER Platform

Founded in 2022 under the leadership of Assoc. Prof. İbrahim Yılmaz, Head of the Graphic Design Department at Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University's Faculty of Art, Design, and Architecture, TRPOSTER is an international, non-profit online exhibition platform for graphic design. The platform's founding team includes Gökhan Koç, Lecturer at the Graphic Design Program of the Gönen Vocational School of the same university. TRPOSTER's primary goal is to increase social awareness through graphic design and to raise awareness, particularly around themes of social responsibility. The platform organizes international poster exhibitions each year based on a current and universal social theme. It operates under the understanding that graphic design is not merely an aesthetic production field but also a powerful communication tool that enables the expression of current global issues through an artistic language. The first exhibition, held in 2023, was organized under the theme "You Are a Star" and brought together 100 works by 81 artists from 24 countries with art lovers both online and in a physical exhibition space. The second exhibition, held in 2024, focused on the theme of "Human Rights" and featured over 100 works by 84 artists from 27 countries, which were made available online through the platform's official website (www.trposter.com). The theme for 2025 has been set as "Water and Drought," aiming to draw attention to global environmental issues such as the depletion of water resources, water scarcity, and drought from the perspective of artists. TRPOSTER positions graphic design as a field focused on social responsibility and aims to create an interdisciplinary environment for interaction. The platform encourages art production based on aesthetic value, visual imagery, communicative messages, and social awareness, evaluating design as both a visual form of expression and a tool for generating social consciousness and awareness. In this way, TRPOSTER takes on both an artistic and social function within the contemporary design understanding, revealing the critical and transformative potential of graphic design.



TRPOSTER

TRPOSTER

SERGI ▾

KİMİZ

İLETİŞİM

İNSAN HAKLARI [Human Rights]

Uluslararası Online Poster Sergisi - International Online Poster Exhibition

[SERGİ KATALOĞU] [Exhibition Catalog]

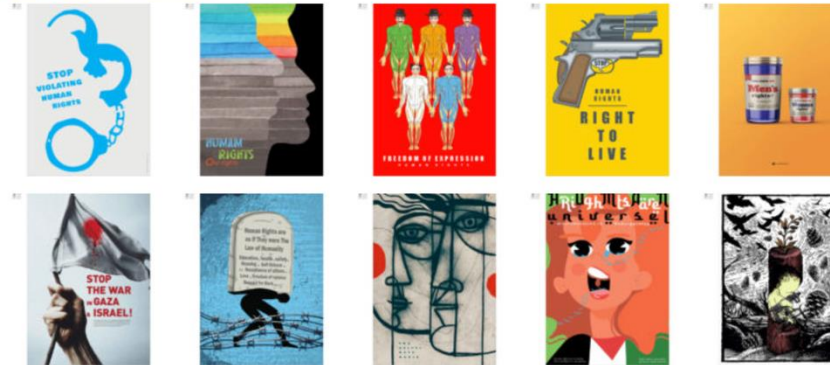


Figure 1. TRPOSTER International Human Rights Exhibition, 2025 www.trposter.com

2. Graphic Design and Poster

Graphic design, as one of the most powerful tools of visual communication, has developed over time to respond to different needs. In this context, it is known that posters are one of the oldest and most fundamental means of communication in history (Kauffer, 1924:33). Design is not a field with a single, unchanging solution. Therefore, designers must constantly strive to discover new forms of expression and communication techniques (Becer, 1997:64). Today, it has become a field that encompasses different disciplines. The basic principles of design include balance, emphasis, hierarchy, rhythm, proportion, unity, and contrast, and these principles are brought to life through visual elements such as line, color, typography, form, texture, and space (Lupton & Phillips, 2018:471). Posters are one of the most effective visual communication tools in modern society. Serving both an informational and a guiding function, posters occupy the intersection of art and communication. One of the oldest examples of posters in the world is a lost slave notice used in Egypt. During the Song Dynasty in ancient China, the poster that read, "Choose the 'White Rabbit' brand without fail," is among the earliest known examples of poster applications in history (Liu, 2018). Modern art and design movements have played a decisive role in the development of contemporary poster language. Cubism, Expressionism, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Bauhaus, and International Typographic Style are particularly prominent. Posters are generally divided into three main categories according to their function: advertising posters, cultural posters, and social posters. When evaluating poster design, four fundamental criteria are emphasized. These include the clarity of the message, the coherence between the message and the image, verbal hierarchy, and visibility. According to Milton Glaser, the key principles in poster design include attractiveness, providing information or arousing curiosity in the viewer, having a motivating quality, and using a language that is appropriate and understandable to the target audience (Becer, 1997:204). A poster essentially serves as a simple and direct form of communication with the aim of conveying an idea or creating a specific impact on the audience.

3. The Importance of Human Rights and Poster

Human rights, in their simplest definition, refer to the inalienable, universal, and equal rights that all individuals possess simply by virtue of being human. This concept aims to protect the dignity of the individual and create a global sense of responsibility beyond state borders, representing the highest moral and political ideals. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, was a turning point in this regard. However, with the onset of the Cold War, this ideal was largely overshadowed. Despite the United Nations' declaration of 1968 as the "International Year of Human Rights," the concept failed to transform into a powerful global movement, and human rights only gained moral ideal and

international movement identity in the West from the 1970s onwards (Moyn, 2010:62). Human rights are the fundamental rights and freedoms that every individual possesses simply by virtue of being human. These rights encompass universal values such as life, liberty, equality, security, education, health, and freedom of expression. The importance of human rights stems from the fact that they are the fundamental condition for individuals to live a dignified life. Ensuring these rights in a society not only protects individual freedoms but also guarantees the continuity of social peace, justice, and democratic order (Donnelly, 2013:98). Communities implement social responsibility projects with the aim of supporting social justice, strengthening collective consciousness, and creating awareness among individuals. One of the most effective tools for disseminating these projects to a wide audience is posters. A poster is a communication tool that can quickly and directly convey a specific idea, event, or message through visual and typographic elements, and stands out for its informative and persuasive function (Ambrose & Harris, 2012:102). Posters that serve as announcements not only inform the masses but also raise awareness of social issues and encourage action. Graphic design plays an important role in spreading awareness of human rights in this context. Designers use art movements, typography, colors, and symbols to emphasize universal values such as social justice, equality, and freedom. Aesthetic choices in visual communication establish an emotional connection with the audience, making the message more memorable and effective. Different design approaches are strategically crafted to draw attention to human rights violations, raise awareness, or encourage a sense of solidarity. The importance of human rights-themed posters stems not only from their role as a means of communication but also from their power to shape social memory. Posters establish a place in individuals' minds by making universal values visible, increase social awareness, and prepare the ground for collective action. In this respect, posters can be considered a powerful tool that bridges artistic expression and social responsibility.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Purpose and Scope of the Study

The aim of this study is to reveal the meanings conveyed to the audience by the symbols in selected posters featured in the international "Human Rights" poster exhibition organized by the TRPOSTER Platform in 2024, and to uncover the hidden symbolic layers behind these symbols. The findings are expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions to the design process for researchers, designers, and poster producers working in the field of graphic design. The TRPOSTER platform is an international platform that supports visual productions on the theme of human rights and aims to raise social awareness in this area. Events organized through selection committees composed of local and foreign academics and professional designers draw attention to current issues in social and cultural contexts, while enabling the analysis of messages conveyed through the visual and symbolic language of posters. In this context, the TRPOSTER platform is considered an important initiative that highlights the social responsibility aspect of graphic design and serves as an example for design processes.

4.2. Research Methodology

This research is based on the document review method, one of the qualitative research designs. In qualitative research, document review is a technique that enables the systematic examination of written, visual, or audio materials related to the research topic (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021:102). In this study, posters with documentary value were evaluated and analyzed in the context of visual communication. Within the theoretical framework of the research, a semiotic analysis method was adopted in order to analyze the meaning production processes of visual signs. During the analysis process, the relationship between "sign," "signifier," and "signified" was first examined in line with Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. This approach revealed the basic building blocks of meaning, based on the assumption that visual elements function like linguistic signs. Subsequently, Roland Barthes' concepts of "denotation" and "connotation" were examined using semiotic methods.



4.3. Research Universe and Sample

In this study, the sample was selected from among the posters featured in the international exhibition themed "Human Rights" organized by the TRPOSTER Platform in 2024. The posters in question were chosen because they strongly reflect different human rights themes and are representative in terms of content and design. The selected works were analyzed using semiotic analysis methods to reveal the multi-layered meanings of visual signs.

4.4. Limitations of the Research

The posters examined in this study do not cover all the works exhibited on the TRPOSTER platform, but are limited to a small number of examples that are highly representative in terms of visual diversity and formal characteristics. Therefore, the findings obtained are not generalizable, but rather constitute a detailed analysis based on the selected examples. Future research that includes comparative analyses across different cultural contexts, works with larger sample sizes, and incorporates quantitative methods will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the social impacts of graphic design products.

5. SEMIOTICS

5.1. What is Semiotics?

The concept of semiotics derives its origin from the Ancient Greek word *semeion*, meaning "sign" or "indication." In the modern sense, semiotics is a field of study that examines situations in which an object, form, symbol, or phenomenon has the capacity to represent something else (Rifat, 2007:113). In this context, semiotics deals with all signs that carry meaning not only in a linguistic context but also in a visual, auditory, and cultural context. As an interdisciplinary field, semiotics analyzes the processes of meaning formation of signs and symbols and the roles they play in communication between individuals and societies. Various sign systems such as spoken language, writing, visual images, facial expressions, and body language are the objects of study in this field. The semiotic approach aims to provide a deep understanding of meaning production processes by analyzing the structures of such signs, the meanings they carry, and the cultural contexts in which they are embedded (İzbul, 2007). The concept of semiotics became a systematic discipline in the modern sense at the beginning of the 20th century through the independent work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure defined language as "a system of signs" and explained signs in terms of the relationship between the signifier (the form of expression) and the signified (the concept) (Saussure, 1998:48). While Saussure's approach relates semiotics to linguistics in a more structuralist vein, Peirce developed a broader and more philosophical framework. In Peirce's triadic model, signs are classified as icons, indices, and symbols. This classification emphasizes that signs are not only dependent on objects, but also on the interpretation of the subject perceiving them. (Peirce, 1955:354). Today, semiotics intersects with many fields such as linguistics, communication, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, art history, and graphic design. Especially in visual communication and design studies, the analysis of signs is effectively used to reveal the layers of meaning in posters, logos, advertising campaigns, and digital media products. Thus, semiotics has become not only a theoretical field but also an interdisciplinary research method for analyzing social discourses, ideological structures, and cultural representations (Yılmaz, 2020)

5.2. Fundamental Concepts in Semiotics

Semiotics is a discipline that examines the processes by which signs create meaning, the mechanisms by which these processes operate, and the functions of meaning in a socio-cultural context. Roland Barthes made original contributions to this field, demonstrating that signs are not merely linguistic elements but also carry meaning in many areas such as fashion, food, cinema, literature, design, advertising, and visual culture. Barthes' fundamental approach is based on the idea that cultural phenomena are a set of readable signs, each of which contains specific layers of meaning (Bircan, 2015).

5.3. Signifier, Signified and Signifier

Semiotics is a branch of science that studies the structure, function, and meaning-making processes of signs. In this context, the concepts of sign, signifier, and signified form the cornerstones of semiotics. These concepts have been shaped by the works of theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. A sign is any physical or abstract element that can take the place of another thing and represent it. In other words, it focuses on examining the internal structure of the sign rather than directly explaining reality or the object itself (Fiske, 2003). One of the basic concepts of semiotics, the sign is the building block that enables the transfer of meaning in the communication process. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the sign emerges from the combination of the signifier and the signified (Atabek & Atabek, 2007:67). Graphic design is one of the most powerful areas of visual communication and produces meaning through signs in the interaction between individuals and audiences. From a semiotic perspective, every design element, colors, typography, icons, photographs, functions as a sign. These signs are more than just aesthetic elements; they are carriers of cultural and social codes. (Çağlar, 2012). The signifier is the visual element that appears at the formal level of design and concretizes an idea, object, or phenomenon. In contrast, the signified is the conceptual meaning that the visual element evokes in the viewer or the message that the designer wishes to convey. In other words, every color, typography, or visual element used in posters or graphic design products is both an aesthetic choice and a signifier that makes a particular idea visible. From this perspective, the signifier represents the surface form of the design, while the signified expresses the conceptual content underlying this form (Ambrose & Harris, 2012:102). The signified is the conceptual content that a sign aims to convey. In other words, it represents the message that the designer or communicator wants to convey. The image or concept that emerges in the individual's mind after the process of interpretation is the equivalent of the signified. In other words, the signified constitutes the meaning dimension of the sign that is interpreted by the perceiver and is one of the two fundamental elements that constitute the sign. In this respect, it can be said that the signified is at the center of semiotic analyses (Barthes, 2009:86).

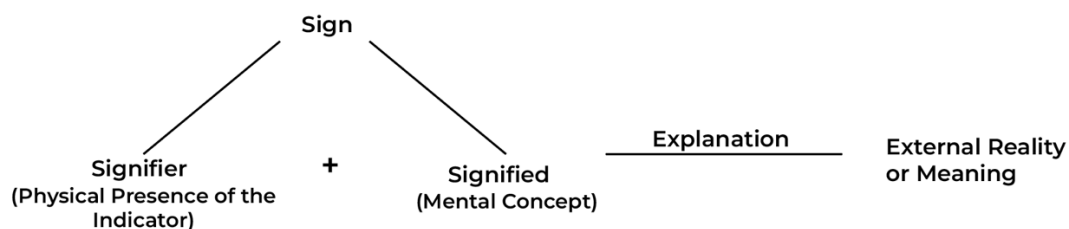


Figure 2. Saussure's Elements of Meaning
Kaynak: John Fiske, Introduction to Communication Studies, 2003:63

5.4. Denotation and Connotation

Roland Barthes is one of the important thinkers who examined the layered structure of meaning in semiotics. Influenced by Saussure's linguistic structure and sign theory, Barthes developed this approach and revealed that meaning operates on two levels: denotation and connotation. This distinction provides a fundamental framework for understanding how signs function and how they produce different meanings in a cultural context. Denotation refers to the simplest and most objective level of meaning expressed by a sign. At this level, the sign is understood as it is, in a way that can be perceived similarly by everyone (Guiraud, 1994:39). For example, the image of a green leaf used in an environmentally themed poster represents, in its literal meaning, only a plant element, i.e., a real leaf found in nature. The figurative meaning, on the other hand, is the second layer that the sign acquires beyond its literal meaning, through its cultural, social, and ideological connotations. At this level, the sign conveys not only the object itself but also the values and emotions associated with it. For example, while the red light symbol is a

traffic sign in its literal meaning, in its figurative meaning it is associated with cultural values such as "danger, stop, and prohibition."

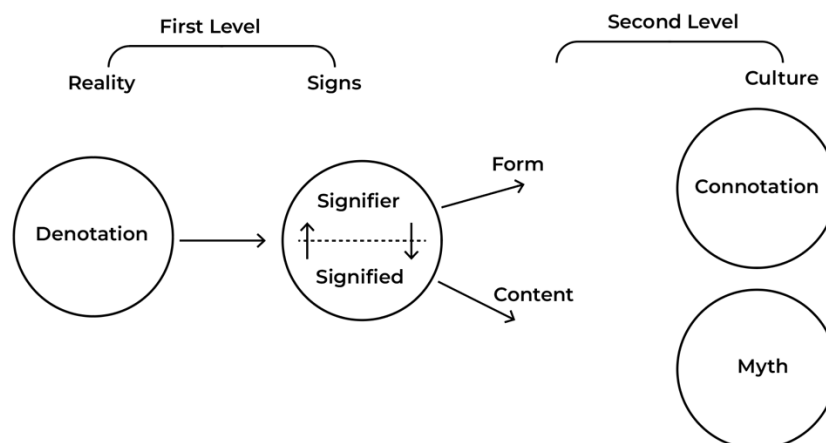


Figure 3. Barthes's Interpretation Scheme
Source: John Fiske, Introduction to Communication Studies, 2003:120

6. FINDINGS and COMMENTS



Figure 4. TRPOSTER International Human Rights Exhibition, Noor Uding Ung, Indonesia, 2024

Table 1: Figure 4 Semiotic Analysis

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Object	Yellow Smiley Face Balloon	Childhood, Happiness, and Innocence
Object	Barbed Wire	Oppression, Violence, Restriction of Freedom
Human	Child's Hand	Vulnerability
Color	Yellow	Hope, Joy, Life Energy
Color	Black	Darkness, Threat, Fear
Writing	Their Smile is a Human Right, Right?	Emphasizing That Smiling Is a Fundamental Human Right

When analyzed in line with Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, using the concepts of denotation and connotation, Figure 4 is seen to present a multi-layered structure of meaning. At the denotative level, the poster features a yellow balloon with a smiling face symbol, barbed wire surrounding the balloon, a child's hand holding the balloon, and the phrase "Their Smile is a Human Right, Right?" in yellow and black colors. These elements

are initially perceived as ordinary objects and signs encountered in everyday life. At the figurative level, however, these signs transcend everyday life and produce a deeper meaning. The yellow balloon is interpreted as a symbol of innocence, happiness, and freedom, while the barbed wire represents oppression, violence, and the restriction of freedom. The child's hand holding the balloon evokes defenselessness and the need for protection, while the yellow color is associated with hope, joy, and life energy, and the black color symbolizes threat, fear, and oppression. Finally, the phrase "Their Smile is a Human Right, Right?" emphasizes that even smiling is a human right, making a critical reference to situations where fundamental rights are under pressure. In this context, it can be said that the poster is composed of ordinary objects and expressions at the literal level, but at the figurative level, it develops a powerful social criticism and human rights discourse.



Figure 5. TRPOSTER International Human Rights Exhibition, Radoslava-Boor, Bulgaria, 2024

Tablo 2: Figure 5 Semiotic Analysis

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Nesne	Comparing Hair to a Noose (Hanging Rope)	Women Under Pressure, Threats to Their Right to Life
Nesne	Showing a Woman's Body with Her Back Turned	Invisibility, Suppression, and Vulnerability
İnsan	Female Figure	Women's Identity, the Struggle for Freedom
Renk	Black Background	Death, Darkness, Threats, and Fear
Renk	Skin Color (Body)	Fragility, Reality, and the Human Condition
Yazı	Woman Life Freedom	Women's Demand for Life and Freedom, Resistance, and Human Rights

When examined in these two layers, the poster in Figure 5 presents a powerful discourse on women's rights and the struggle for freedom. At the literal level, the image features a female figure with her back turned to the viewer, and the way her hair is styled in loops is a reference to the noose. The background is dark, making the woman's body stand out, and the phrase "Woman Life Freedom" is clearly visible at the bottom. At this level, the poster conveys the visible reality to the viewer without requiring any additional cultural or ideological connotations. At the figurative level, however, these visual elements take on a deeper meaning in a social and cultural context. The hair turning into a noose symbolizes that women's right to life is under threat, and that their freedom is being taken away by mechanisms of oppression and violence. The woman's back being turned to the viewer can be interpreted as a sign of the erasure of individual identity, social invisibility, and

defenselessness. The black background evokes darkness, fear, and death, while the flesh color of the body highlights human fragility, defenselessness, and the need for protection. The slogan "Woman Life Freedom" forms the core meaning of this visual. It represents the universal symbol of women's struggle for life, freedom, and rights on both an individual and collective scale.



Figure 6. TRPOSTER International Human Rights Exhibition, Ali Delzendehrooy, Iran, 2024

Tablo 3: Figure 6 Semiotic Analysis

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Object	Big Blue Jar (Men's Rights)	The broader, more powerful, and privileged rights attributed to men
Object	Small Red Jar (Women's Rights)	The more limited and restricted rights attributed to women
Color	Blue	The power, superiority, and authority socially attributed to men
Color	Red	The emotionality, secondary status, and limitations associated with women
Text	Men's Rights	A Social Structure in Which Men's Rights Are Seen as Primary and Dominant
Text	Women's Rights	Criticism of an Unequal System in Which Women's Rights Are Left Behind
Text	Orange/Yellow Tone	Presentation of the Social Problem in a Striking and Eye-Catching Way

Figure 6 shows two jars of different sizes and colors. The larger jar is blue and has the words "Men's Rights" written on it. The other jar is smaller and red, with the words "Women's Rights" written on it. At the literal level, the visual consists solely of two different jars and the simple text written on them. Here, the viewer encounters two jars, one large and blue, the other small and red. At this stage, there is no deeper meaning or interpretation, but the elements presented in the visual are perceived in a straightforward manner. At the figurative level, however, the visual image produces a critical discourse on gender inequality. The large blue jar can be read as a symbolic expression of the fact that men have historically and socially enjoyed broader rights and privileges. In contrast, the small red jar implies that women's rights are restricted and that they are relegated to a secondary position in social life. While the sizes of the jars visualize this inequality, the colors used also contribute to the imagery. Blue is often associated with power, authority, stability, and rationality in Western culture, while red brings to mind associations of emotionality, fragility, and secondary status, which are often identified with women. Thus, the visual goes beyond the quantitative difference in the distribution of rights to reflect the cultural codes of gender.



Figure 7. TRPOSTER International Human Rights Exhibition, Jatin Gohil, India, 2024

Tablo 4: Figure 7 Semiotic Analysis

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Object	Microphone	Means of Expression, the Power of Voice and Words
Object	Fist-shaped hand	Resistance, the Struggle for Freedom, and the Quest for Rights
Object	Barbed wire	Oppression, Censorship, Obstacles, and Restrictions on Freedom
Color	Red	Struggle, Courage, Danger, and Passion
Color	Black background	Seriousness, Threats, and an Environment of Oppression
Writing	Speak up, don't stay silent	A Call to Speak Out, an Emphasis on Defending Human Rights
Words	Love, Hope, Food, Peace, Justice, Freedom of expression, Dignity, Religion, Freedom, Equality, Prosperity, Education	Fundamental Human Rights, Freedoms, and Universal Values

When examined on two levels, the poster in Figure 7 presents a powerful discourse on freedom of expression and the struggle for fundamental human rights. At the literal level, the fist figure in the shape of a microphone in the center of the poster is striking. The lower part of the microphone is tied with barbed wire, and the phrase "Speak Up Don't Sit Quiet" is clearly displayed at the bottom of the poster. Additionally, concepts such as "love, hope, food, peace, justice, speech, dignity, religion, freedom, equality, prosperity, and education" are listed around the fist. On this level, the poster makes visible the call to speak out and express basic rights, without any additional cultural or ideological connotations. On a deeper level, however, the visual elements carry a more profound meaning in a social and ideological context. The fist being presented in the form of a microphone symbolizes the transformation of the individual voice into social resistance and struggle. The barbed wire evokes censorship, oppression, and restrictions on freedom of expression, while the red color represents struggle, courage, and social resistance, and the black background represents darkness, oppression, and a threatening environment. The concepts arranged around the fist signify not only the defense of individual rights but also the defense of freedom, justice, equality, and human dignity on a universal scale. The slogan "Speak Up Don't Sit Quiet" at the bottom of the poster is a call to not remain silent and to take an active stance in the fight for rights.



Figure 8. TRPOSTER International Human Rights Exhibition, Jianfei Lu, China, 2024

Tablo 5: Figure 8 Semiotic Analysis

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Object	High-heeled shoes	Female Identity, Femininity, Emphasis on Gender
Object	Hand reaching out to a woman	Harassment, Threats, Pressure, and Violations
Human	Woman's leg	The Female Body as a Target and Vulnerability
Color	Red background	Struggle, Courage, Danger, and Passion
Color	Black background	Danger, Violence, Warning, and Implications of Sexual Violence
Color	Black skirt	Darkness, Concealment, and Elements of Coercion
Writing	No harassment	A Clear Stance Against Harassment, Human Rights, and Demands for Women's Safety

Visual communication products that address social issues do not merely convey what is visible; they also produce deeper meanings through cultural codes and ideological discourses. From this perspective, Barthes' semiotic approach makes it possible to examine the connotations that visual elements carry in their social and cultural context, going beyond their surface meanings. In the poster under examination, the visual arrangement constructed around the female body can be read on two levels: both through directly perceptible elements and through connotations that point to gender inequality. In Figure 8, at the literal level, the visual depicts a woman's leg, high-heeled shoes, a black skirt, a red background, and a white hand reaching toward the woman. The phrase "No Harassment" in large font at the bottom of the poster draws attention. At this level, the visual conveys only the visible objects and the written message to the viewer. At the connotative level, these signs point to a deeper cultural and social context. The woman's leg and high-heeled shoes symbolize female identity, femininity, and the visual codes of gender. The hand reaching out toward the woman signifies harassment, threat, and violation of personal space. The black skirt is associated with concealment and suppression, while the red background evokes violence, danger, and a sense of urgency. The phrase "No Harassment" at the center of the poster transcends the individual level, becoming a statement of social demand and collective stance against violations of women's safety and human rights.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined selected posters from the international poster exhibition on the theme of "Human Rights" organized within the TRPOSTER Platform using semiotic analysis

methods and interpreted the findings in line with the theoretical framework. When the posters examined are evaluated holistically, it can be seen that the designers used similar symbolic strategies. The contrast between freedom and oppression (barbed wire, chains, dark backgrounds versus elements symbolizing hope and resistance), the strong representation of female identity, the ideological functions of colors (red—struggle, black—oppression, yellow—hope), and the integration of slogans with visual elements emerge as common themes. Although these elements were produced in different contexts, they reveal that human rights-themed posters carry similar social messages and that graphic design constitutes a universal language of communication. The basic layers of meaning were determined through Saussure's signifier-signified model, while the cultural and social connotations of these signs were revealed within the framework of Barthes' distinction between denotation and connotation. For example, in posters addressing women's rights, hair transformed into a noose or elements threatening the body function as everyday objects at the denotative level. At the connotative level, they make powerful references to women's struggle for freedom, social pressures, and discourses of resistance. Similarly, symbols used in posters addressing children's rights or freedom of expression present objective indicators on a superficial level but produce critical and cautionary messages regarding universal human rights values on a deeper level of meaning. The findings show that graphic design is not only an aesthetic production but also a powerful communication tool that draws attention to social issues and raises awareness among the public. As emphasized in the literature, poster designs are considered effective visual communication products with the potential to reach a wide audience through message-image integrity and cultural symbols. The results obtained are parallel to existing studies in the literature and reinforce the power of posters to shape social memory. However, the limitations of the study should also be considered. The research was conducted on only five selected posters, and the findings are more of an in-depth qualitative analysis than generalizable. Furthermore, the analysis was limited to semiotic methods, and audience or experimental approaches were excluded from the scope of this study. Future research involving larger samples and comparative studies of different cultural contexts will contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of the social impact of graphic design products. In conclusion, this study has revealed that examining human rights-themed posters in the context of graphic design principles plays an important role in the processes of social awareness and consciousness-raising. Semiotic analysis has made visible not only the visual aesthetic aspect of the designs but also their cultural and ideological background. In this regard, the research contributes to the field of graphic design at both theoretical and practical levels, emphasizing the importance of academically examining visual communication products with a human rights theme.

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