

Barossa be consumed: a semiotic smorgasbord for Southeast Asians

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Abstract

Purpose – This study is an attempt to apply the techniques of semiotics in conjunction with quantitative analysis to decode and interpret an advertisement which promotes the South Australian Barossa Valley as a tourist destination.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was submitted to a Southeast Asian student and postgraduate sample. Regression analysis and qualitative analysis were carried out, which suggested that the advertisement was engaging the majority of the audience.

Findings – Most respondents expressed a desire to visit the location and used language which was evocative and connective. Those who did not or who were turned off by the advertisement's content expressed themselves in language which terminated further engagement.

Research limitations/implications – The sample was a non-target group, but this is an advantage because it provides a base level of unconditioned response.

Practical implications – A better understanding of semiotics may reinforce other areas of marketing endeavour such as social marketing approaches which are gaining more importance in the still developing COVID-19 economy. This methodology can be extended to other marketing communication contexts.

Social implications – Once campaigns have been aimed at target audiences, there may be potential to orientate another campaign at non-target audiences using the same advertisement. In terms of global marketing, this is extension rather than adaptation.

Originality/value – This study provides an example of how marketing could use semiotics in conjunction with quantitative methods to determine an audience's response and the intention to purchase a product or service.

Keywords Semiotics, Southeast Asian Tourist, Advertising, Segmentation, Targeting, Destination marketing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This study features the response of a cohort of Southeast Asian students, largely drawn from Bangladesh to a destination marketing advertisement encouraging tourism to South Australia's Barossa Valley. At first sight, this may appear an unusual group to consider, since the original target group for the advertisement was domestic Australian travellers. However, the advantage of using this non-target demographic is that it allows the establishment of a base line of unconditioned response from a neutral sample. It emerged that 87% of



respondents were unfamiliar with the Barossa Valley before viewing the advertisement. Their response was more likely to be spontaneous than response provided by an Australian audience who was familiar with the nuances of local cultural codes and destinations. This, in turn, allows a primary focus on the basic elements of the advertisement and their semiotic function.

Semiotics

There is a growing interest in understanding the application of semiotic capture especially in the marketing and tourism literature (see Ghodrati, 2022; Kirici Tekeli *et al.*, 2022). Complex semiotic perspective or characteristics are often studied in the discipline of communication and physical and social sciences (see Mittelberg, 2018; Salerno, 2021). This research explores how semiotics be integrated into the process of determining audience response in a marketing and tourism-centric promotional contents.

Despite presenting potential as a method for understanding texts, semiotics is burdened with excessive theoretical complexity and disciplinary issues. This means that relating it to the more practical discipline of marketing is difficult (Chandler, 2005; Mick, 1986). Some of this is due to the fundamental differences between the interpretivist and positivist approaches. Marketing tends to be focused more on quantifiable exchanges of value which can be related to interpretivist frameworks (Hunt, 1994), whereas semiotics delivers an excess of nuanced responses which defy quantification (Eco, 1979; Elam, 2003). Another issue with the employment of semiotics concerns disciplinary differences between the European and the American schools and the consequent lack of a standardised approach (Raber and Budd, 2003).

Semiotics is more often employed as a singular tour de force demonstration display of interpretative ability by academics than as a systematic program applied to determining audience response (Debray, 1996). As a discipline focusing on the study of signs and the signified, it has had a long gestation with early development by De Saussure (2004) and Peirce (1965), leading to energetic discussions and applications during the seventies and eighties (Barthes, 1974; Eco, 1979; Todorov, 1977). These studies broke texts down into coded networks of elements, which were then interpreted. The approaches were excessively complex and resisted empirical application. Moreover, they were subject-specific and relied on the interpretative ability of the practitioner. It was hard to extend to other areas without a postgraduate-level grounding in poetics or critical theory. Something simpler and easier to use is needed. While various efforts have been made to apply it to advertising and marketing contexts (Chandler, 2005; Mick, 1986), these have been isolated and unsystematic (Foster, 2017; Rossolatos, 2013). Nonetheless, there is considerable potential for semiotics to inform marketing decisions through the analysis of communications material. This paper is an attempt to utilise that potential to determine how an advertisement works to affect audience preference for a tourism destination.

Although marketers would like to think that well-targeted advertising that addresses precisely configured segments with well differentiated offerings (Dickson and Ginter, 1987) will lead automatically to increased sales, evidence confirming this is contradictory. Further scrutiny suggests that the linkage between advertising and successful marketing often amounts to rules of thumb and empirical generalisations (Wind and Sharp, 2009). While advertising usually has some stimulatory effect on sales, there is also the limiting phenomenon of double jeopardy, and money spent on promotion can eventually exceed the sales revenue generated (Sharp *et al.*, 2010). Working within these constraints, companies strive to have cost-effective advertising campaigns which achieve brand distinction and create associated memory structures that stay in the mind of the consumer. However, there is

no winning formula that holds true in all situations, and making this happen consistently is problematic (Wind and Sharp, 2009).

Decoding these short and powerful texts into their individual components and finding out how and why they work can be done using semiotic analysis. Extending from these discoveries into the discipline of marketing could be a productive exercise if methodology could be simplified and standardised (Chandler, 2005; Mick, 1986). Determining which elements in an advertising campaign might affect purchase decisions would have great utility. Given that possibility, there is merit in bridging between the two disciplines to see how the response to basic experiential elements in an advertisement might affect the decision by a non-target market of Southeast Asian students to embrace a new Australian tourism destination. It is suggested that this is an area which is appropriate for mixed method research as described by Dewasiri *et al.* (2018). In this approach, several methods such as quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic are combined in a triangulated approach. The methods used in this study are quantitative, qualitative and interpretative approaches.

Literature review

Australian tourism destination marketing has had a chequered history of success and failure. The “Throw another shrimp on the barbie” campaign (1983–1987) was wildly successful, leveraging on the celebrity recognition of Paul Hogan, the main star of the Crocodile Dundee movies (Glover, 2009). However, the 2006 Lara Bingle “Where the bloody hell are you?” campaign was not so successful, especially in the UK where the use of any profanity in media communications is frowned upon (Khamis, 2012). Subsequent research suggested that while two-thirds of viewers were positive towards the advertisement, one-third strongly disapproved (Winter and Gallon, 2008). The difficulty of coming up with a winning formula is demonstrated by these two campaigns.

Apart from the mining boom, South Australia’s economy was stagnant, and after the global financial crisis of 2008, this pressure only intensified (Connolly and Lewis, 2010). As a result, there was a need to boost tourism to the area which would support other industries such as hospitality and viticulture. Tourism is an industry with a high return on investment for advertising dollars spent (Kulendran and Dwyer, 2009). The genesis of this advertisement campaign can perhaps be found in research sponsored by the South Australian Tourism Commission and the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre established by the Australian Commonwealth Government. This explored the relative importance of lifestyle, attraction, self-expression, and food and wine and concluded that lifestyle was central to marketing South Australian destinations, including the Barossa Valley (Gross *et al.*, 2008). Other states such as Western Australia have also identified the synergies between wine, lifestyle and tourism (Carlsen and Dowling, 2001). This was often developed and amplified by festivals and regional events that featured wine and food (Beverland *et al.*, 2001). Against this backdrop of tourism potential and regional economic stagnation, the Barossa be Consumed campaign was developed.

This advertisement showcases the darkly apocalyptic Nick Cave song, *Red Right Hand*, against an implied narrative about a family coming to the area to enjoy the local delights (see, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wArNbXFvJLQ&ab_channel=KWP%21). It features a montage of images spliced together with jump cuts and alluding to multiple gastronomic and experiential delights. The advertisement stresses the attractions of a regional food-related lifestyle (Grunert *et al.*, 2001). It is pitched at interstate Australian travellers as an intimate and authentic cultural experience (Culler, 2007). Prior to the 2014 campaign, the Barossa was regarded as an obligatory and routine destination for local tourists and international travellers. Effectively, the 2014 campaign repositioned the Barossa Valley in the market, establishing it as a premier location while further delineating and enhancing its brand

personality (Aaker, 1997; Buhalis, 2000). Going further, Luckman (2015) has argued that this advertisement characterised the Barossa Valley as a post-production zone which attracts creative people to engage in activities that are not linked to traditional industries (Gibson, 2014; Peace, 2006; Thompson and Prideaux, 2019).

Research questions

In terms of marketing discourse, the selected advertisement can be initially considered using Aaker's framework (1997) as a starting point for discussion. There are certainly aspects of competence and sophistication in the brand personality of the Barossa Valley, portrayed in this advertisement, as the various types of gourmet food are prepared and served. The advertisement also provides elements of ruggedness suggested by the landscape, sincerity portrayed by the family in discovery mode and excitement delivered by the edgy soundtrack. However, although useful as a broad set of descriptors, this framework does not suggest how brand personality translates into a purchase decision. For a better understanding of how an advertisement like this might work with an audience, it is necessary to have a more granular level of engagement and a focus on the decision to choose it as a preferred destination. This is where the use of semiotics is more appropriate. In keeping with these observations, this research was informed by three research questions:

- RQ1.* Which elements of the advertisement have encouraged positive response towards the Barossa Valley as a preferred destination?
- RQ2.* How do the elements of this advertisement relate to each other to influence the preference for the Barossa Valley as a destination?
- RQ3.* Was gender an important factor in determining the decision to visit the Barossa Valley as a destination?

To address these questions, this paper employs selective aspects of semiotic capture derived from focal points suggested by Anstey and Bull (2010). Their framework was designed to explore how a multimodal text works in the mind of the audience. Specifically, it has been used in pedagogical contexts to teach class groups how to decode texts by identifying key elements. As such, it is easily applied to groups who are not familiar with the approach. It uses the identification of linguistic elements such as vocabulary, the structure and grammar of language, visual elements such as colour and point of view in images, audio elements such as music and sound effects, gestural elements such as movement, facial expression and body language and spatial elements such as layout and the organisation of objects (Anstey and Bull, 2010). Identification of the elements is experienced as a necessary first step before more detailed analysis of audience response can occur. Anstey and Bull (2010) used a single A4 page handout to do this. We used the same framework in Survey Monkey with questions relating to those descriptors.

Methodology

The sample consisted of international Southeast Asian students ($N = 98$) including undergraduate and postgraduate students who were resident in Australia and other countries. The questionnaire was administered via Survey Monkey. The country of residence was Bangladesh for 58% of respondents, and other for the balance of 42%. The country of origin was Bangladesh for 68% of respondents with 32% for the balance including India, Philippines and Vietnam. Most participants were Muslim at 61%, with Hindus at 15%, Christians at 6%, Sikh at 2% and Other at 8%. Vegetarians made up 12% of the sample, with 88% not being vegetarian. The age of 34% was 18–20 with a further 42% being 21–30 and the

balance of 24% being over 31. Females comprised 59% of the sample, with males making up the balance at 41%.

The survey determined demographic factors such as age, gender, location, country of origin, employment status, religion and dietary preferences. It then required the respondents to consider the advertisement in terms of language, visual, audio, movement, spatial and character elements (Anstey and Bull, 2010). These questions allowed open response and provided the basis for the qualitative analysis. The survey had questions about their preferences for tourism destinations. This was followed by scalar questions employing a slider bar to evaluate their liking for visual elements, the song, the destination, food and drink, lifestyle and whether they found any elements distasteful. These provided the basis for quantitative analysis using regression. Subsequent questions assessed how well the advertisement worked for the respondents. Response from the public on YouTube postings and other critical reception was then discussed to evaluate interpretative responses to this advertisement which featured elements of semiotic analysis. This, in turn, suggests ways that semiotics might be used in marketing research.

Response

As Figure 1 suggests, this advertisement worked for most respondents in the sample, with 69% liking the food and drink, 67% liking the visual elements, 66% liking the destination, 63% liking the lifestyle, 59% liking the song and just 35% finding elements in the advertisement distasteful.

Qualitative analysis of response

NVivo analysis of the response to open-ended questions concerning language, visuals, audio, movement, special and character elements of the “Barossa” advertisement reveals 44 words which were used in both positive and negative responses, though in different proportions. The responses are predominantly positive (69 out of 98 responses), whereas only 28 respondents expressed negative views about the advertisement, and the rest did not respond to the question about whether the advertisement worked for them. Table 1 and Figures 2–4 present the word counts from two different groups of qualitative responses, that is, positive

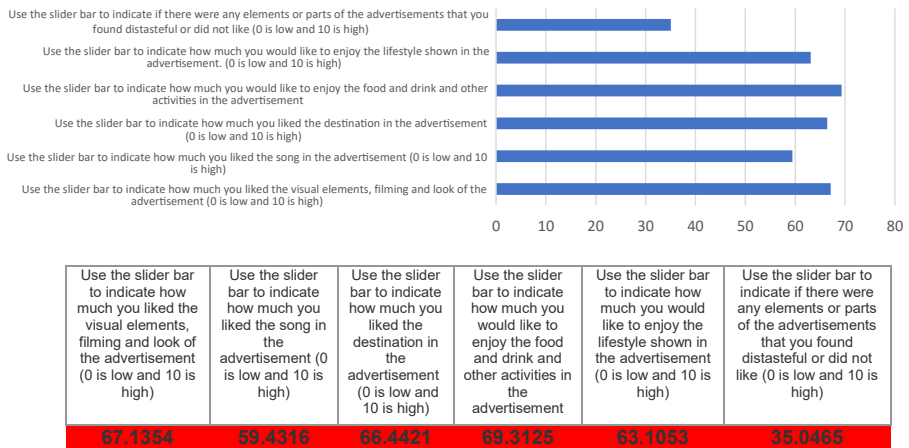


Figure 1.
Basic response to the advertisement

Source(s): Figure from the results of the study by authors

Common words	Common word count in both positive and negative responses				Words exclusive to either positive or negative responses			
	Positive response to the advertisement (N = 69)		Negative response to the advertisement (N = 28)		Positive response to the advertisement (N = 69)		Negative response to the advertisement (N = 28)	
	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	Count	Weighted percentage (%)
Expression	48	4.82	12	1.93	5	0.5	4	0.65
Objects	31	3.11	13	2.09	4	0.4	3	0.48
People	28	2.81	19	3.06	3	0.3	3	0.48
Scenes	26	2.61	5	0.81	3	0.3	3	0.48
Landscape	27	2.71	9	1.46	3	0.3	3	0.48
Language	24	2.41	8	1.29	3	0.3	3	0.48
Music	24	2.41	7	1.13	3	0.3	3	0.48
Animals	25	2.51	20	3.23	2	0.2	3	0.48
Body	22	2.21	8	1.29	2	0.2	2	0.32
Symbols	22	2.21	8	1.29	2	0.2	2	0.32
Words	22	2.21	8	1.29	2	0.2	2	0.32
Characters	21	2.11	4	0.65	2	0.2	2	0.32
Sound	20	2.01	6	0.97	2	0.2	2	0.32
Vocabulary	19	1.91	5	0.81	2	0.2	2	0.32
Colour	24	2.42	7	1.13	2	0.2	2	0.32
Effects	16	1.61	3	0.48	2	0.2	2	0.32
Facial	15	1.51	5	0.81	2	0.2	2	0.32
Lighting	15	1.51	2	0.32	2	0.2	2	0.32
Gesture	20	2.01	6	0.97	2	0.2	2	0.32
Movement	14	1.41	6	0.97	2	0.2	2	0.32
Motives	15	1.33	3	0.48	2	0.2	2	0.32
Voice	13	1.31	8	1.29	2	0.2	2	0.32
Lyrics	11	1.1	5	0.81	2	0.2	2	0.32
Layout	10	1	5	0.81	2	0.2	2	0.32
Props	10	1	7	1.13	2	0.2	2	0.32
Volume	10	1	4	0.65	2	0.2	2	0.32
Angle	11	0.11	5	0.81	2	0.2	2	0.32

(continued)

Table 1. Qualitative contents from the open-ended questions about language, visuals, audio, movement, special and character elements of the Barossa advertisement (NVivo output)

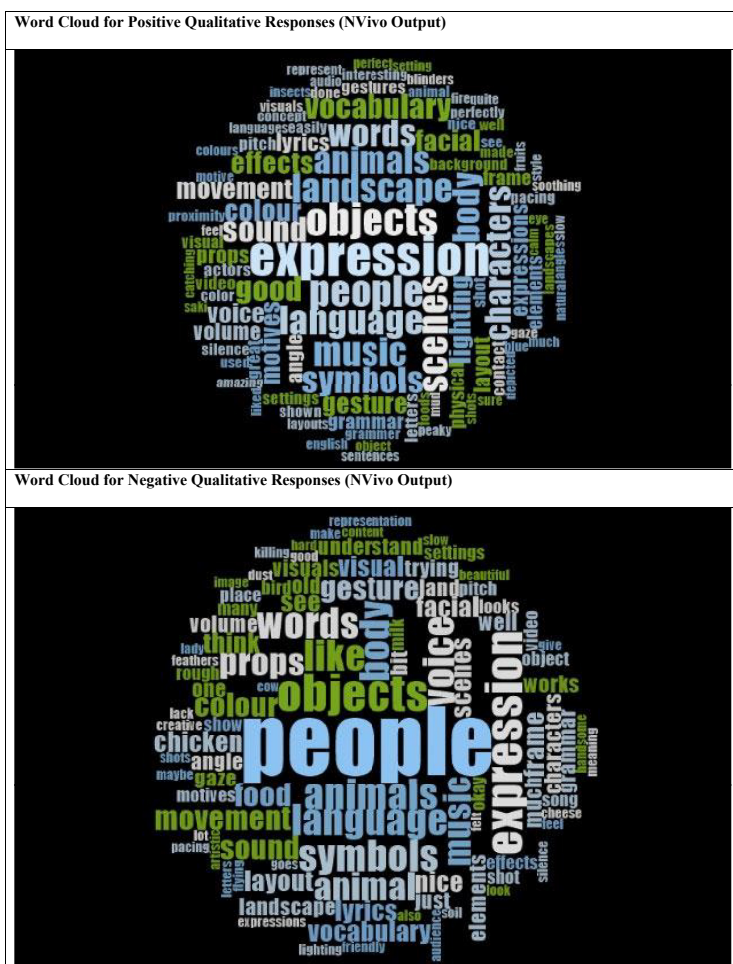
Common words	Common word count in both positive and negative responses				Words exclusive to either positive or negative responses				Weighted percentage (%)	
	Positive response to the advertisement (N = 69)		Negative response to the advertisement (N = 28)		Positive response to the advertisement (N = 69)		Negative response to the advertisement (N = 28)			
	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	Count	Weighted percentage (%)		
Frame	8	0.8	5	0.81	Represent	2	0.2	Meaning	2	0.32
Grammar	11	0.11	4	0.65	Saki	2	0.2	Representation	2	0.32
Elements	7	0.7	4	0.65	Sentences	2	0.2	Slow	2	0.32
Physical	7	0.7	1	0.16	Setting	2	0.2	Soil	2	0.32
Actors	6	0.6	1	0.16	Slow	2	0.2	Table	2	0.32
Great	6	0.6	1	0.16	Soothing	2	0.2	Together	2	0.32
Letters	6	0.6	2	0.32	Style	2	0.2	Vibe	2	0.32
Pitch	6	0.6	3	0.48	Tourism	2	0.2	Young	2	0.32
Video	6	0.6	3	0.48	Tree	2	0.2	Activities	2	0.32
Settings	5	0.5	3	0.48	Understand	2	0.2	Culture	2	0.32
Shot	7	0.7	5	0.80	Usage	2	0.2	Movie	2	0.32
Background	4	0.4	1	0.16	Word	2	0.2	Produces	2	0.32
Nice	5	0.5	5	0.81	Character	2	0.2			
Pacing	5	0.5	2	0.32	Farm	2	0.2			
Silence	4	0.4	2	0.32						
Foods	4	0.4	6	0.97						
Gaze	3	0.3	4	0.65						
Works	2	0.2	4	0.65						

Note(s):

a. At least one of the groups (positive and negative responses) have used these words more than once. Words used by both groups less than two times have not been included in the table

b. Same words expressed in singular or plural and/or in different spelling or tense have been merged in the table

Source(s): Table from the results of the study by authors



Source(s): Figure from the results of the study by authors

Figure 2. Word cloud for qualitative responses (NVivo output)

vs negative. Some of the respondents who expressed that the advertisement did not work for them still mentioned a few positive aspects of the promotion. For example, R-48 stated, “*The objects used in the video such as farmhouse and the fresh foods are yielded by farmers it was nicely done and grabbed my attention the way it depicted. but I was not very sure about the last part of this video*”. Another respondent (R-51) stated, “*Easy for the ears to take in. Pleasing background music and atmospheric noises but presentation should be clean and eye catching*”.

The dominant common themes in both group of responses include facial expression, objects, people, scenes, landscape, language, music, animals, among others (see [Table 1](#)). For example, R-49 stated, “*the expressions and gestures of those actors done perfectly for me*”. According to R-65, “*Pitch went high sometimes which made the song little amusing. Expressions were calm and soothing. Music was nice too. I liked the way people were depicted in the video . . . being calm and soothing. Animals were shown too, insects as well which made the*

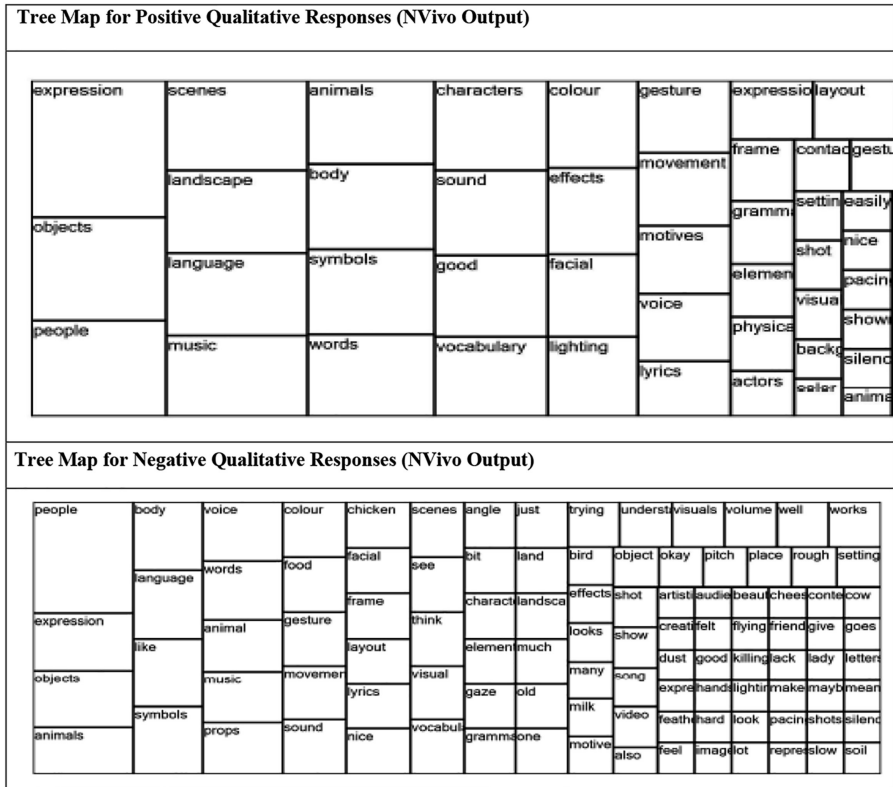


Figure 3. Tree map for qualitative responses (NVivo output)

Source(s): Figure from the results of the study by authors

Question	Response
“In the video, we can see the use of: Fire, earth, eggs, fertility, chicken, life, rain, food, insects, Victorian clothing, sex, death, a family, a couple in a relationship as images, all with a moody and suggestive song as background. What do you think they mean when taken as a whole? Please write a few words with your interpretation.”	“A family visited a rough or rugged place to connect to nature on a camping trip and enjoyed fruits from trees and dining in traditional ways.”
“How are these elements connected to each other?”	“A sense of adventure and a camping trip for a family to experience traditional and more natural ways of living in rough environment.”
“How do these elements work to make you want to go to the Barossa Valley?”	“Does not make me much motivated to experience the heat and dust really though it is a good one for those who love adventure.”

Figure 4. One participant’s answers

Note(s): Figure from the results of the study by authors

video quite realistic of actually what is there in the Valley. Landscape was nice. Objects and props used were good too. Setting was based on a simple lifestyle, that I liked”.

While both groups mentioned these words, the positive responses appreciated these aspects more, while negative responses expressed dissatisfaction or confusion. Most dissatisfaction was expressed with respect to the rough scene or landscapes, facial

expressions, brutality towards animals and food. For example, R-58 stated, “to me it looks boring and dry. The foods advertised do not look appetizing to me. Sure, it shows that things are organic and natural. However, I do not associate with the cultural background of the video advertised. I would feel more interested if the video would show more about family gatherings. It looks so individualistic for me. It can also be because I came from collectivist culture”. However, even the negative responses showed appreciation of the music and visual aspects of the advertisement.

Some words used exclusively by either the positive or the negative responders (but not in both) are also listed in Table 1. Expressions (facial expression and body language), objects (food, drinks, tools and others) and people (family, man, woman and children) are the most common dominant themes that emerged from the responses of both groups (see Figure 2). While positive responses were enthusiastic about these aspects, the negative responses comprise a mixed reaction to it. On the other hand, both positive and negative responses predominantly identified scenes which implied the killing of animals as the least preferred part of the story line. Each group identified the family or togetherness as a positive aspect, although some of the negative responses expressed opinions criticising the depiction of women in traditional roles.

Figure 2 presents the differences in positive and negative responses in a spatially relational format called a word cloud. While similarity can be observed, there are also pronounced differences in the types of words used by positive versus negative responders, with positive responders using words which implied further connection, and negative responders using words with more limited meanings. In Figure 3 tree maps for the NVivo output are displayed. For positive responses. There were fewer categories in the midrange and a slightly higher use of conceptual and relational words. That is to say that positive responders chose nouns which had more scope for connotative meaning (Moriarty, 2002; Nack and Hardman, 2001). For example, R-65 expressed, “Possible reason to visit Barossa Valley could be because of its luscious food that we can see in video. Natural beauty and eating in open could also be one of the reasons. Not only this, I love mangoes a lot and in the video we can see how the girl is picking fresh ones . . . so I would love to go. But the major reason could only be food”.

For negative responses in Figure 3, there were slightly more words used in the midrange, and the words chosen were more active and singular in their focus. Negative responders chose nouns which were more limited in their implications, such as “looks barren and deserty” (R- 43). This is effectively a bias towards denotation or expression of the literal meaning of words.

Negative responses seemed to be more specific and viscerally reactive than conceptually and analytically engaged. This is a very fine distinction and perhaps stems from some of the intrinsic aspects of negative response which is to arrive very quickly at the elements which upset or disturb the viewer. There is consequently less attempt to engage and analyse. Positive response tends to go into more detail and explain the responder’s reaction to the advertisement. This has implications for advertisements since it would tend to suggest that employing negative elements such as dirt, insects or the killing of animals will create a visceral reaction which stops further engagement and causes the audience to switch off. The use of positive elements such as family, food and landscape will stimulate engagement and create salient memory structures which stand out against the backdrop of other marketing offerings. Negative elements may trigger a denotative response in the audience, which is powerful and definite. Effectively, this becomes a dead end which terminates connective associations. On the other hand, positive elements stimulate a connotative response which generates an ongoing and more relational connection. This increased resonance gives more scope for salient memory structures to develop (Rossiter and Ang, 1993; Sharp *et al.*, 2010; Trembath *et al.*, 2011). Why the audience behaves this way is not explained by this research,

but one implication that flows from this is that it is probably better not to include elements in an advertisement that might cause disgust or negative reaction in the audience (Winter and Gallon, 2008).

Follow-up survey

The findings discussed above suggest that there is a great deal of informational richness in this advertisement. An audience member might get one reading the first time they saw it, and second and subsequent readings which vary from this. While they will never totally exhaust the interpretive potential of the text, they will derive greater levels of meaning and understanding with each repeated viewing and subsequent discussion and analysis (Eco, 1979). To evaluate this phenomenon to a limited degree, a small select group ($N = 5$) of respondents who had shown enthusiasm in their response was contacted again and asked to participate in a follow-up survey which allowed them to consider the advertisement in terms of open response questions. This information can be construed as a reading of the advertisement, but once again it was difficult to prompt a deeper analysis from this group even with questions specifically designed to guide them towards connecting semiotic elements together to create meaning. It is likely that while this process occurs on an internal basis, the audience members are unable to externalise it in these terms. For example, one participant, when prompted in the follow-up survey with questions designed to elicit connections between elements, responded as shown in Figure 4.

Despite the best efforts of the researchers to elicit a more complex semiotically oriented interpretation, this is effectively a semantic response couched in experiential terms which addresses the family narrative. While the question itself may need further development and improvement, it is also worth noting that this is the most expansive response from the small subset ($N = 5$) of selected participants drawn from the larger sample ($N = 98$). This tension between semantic versus semiotic response has been observed before with respect to film studies (Burgoyne, 1990). It is possible that an audience member is experiencing the advertisement one way, but when asked to respond in terms of relating semiotic elements, uses another more familiar frame of reference instead and constructing the response in a concrete formula that fits their understanding of pedagogical expectations. Effectively, they are arriving at a purchase decision with a family orientated rationale.

Quantitative analysis of response

In Table 2 it can be seen that 81.5% of respondents responded positively to the suggestion that they would like to visit the Barossa Valley after viewing the advertisement. This is quite a strong response and suggests that in marketing terms the advertisement is successful. On a gender basis, 83.6% of females and 83.8% males responded positively to the suggestion that they would like to visit the Barossa Valley after viewing the advertisement. There was no significant difference in terms of gender response.

	Observed		Predicted Consider to visit		Percentage correct
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Consider to visit	No	12	13	48
		Yes	4	63	94
	Overall percentage				81.5

Table 2.
Classification Table^a

Note(s): a. The cut value is 0.500
Source(s): Table from the results of the study by authors

With the regression analysis, the modal fits to the data set, and the overall association between dependent and independent variables is significant at 95%. The individual effect of independent variables does not appear to be significant except for lifestyle at 0.042 as shown in Table 3. However, the direction of response to other elements can be identified and discussed. The effect of the song, visual elements, destination, food and drinks is inversely related to the decision to choose the Barossa Valley as a tourism destination. Other elements considered were not significant. Directionality suggests that destination and lifestyle were positive influences, while visual elements, song, food and drinks and distasteful elements were negative influences.

Critical reception and interpretation

One stream of comments which followed a YouTube posting of this advertisement was negative, noting that it would not appeal to vegans given the amount of animal produce that was featured, and the advertisement was dark and spooky and redolent with sex and death (KWP, 2021). The question of why someone would want to take their children to visit an area made infamous for serial killings has been raised by social commentators before and after this campaign delivery in 2014 (Orr, 2011; Rofe, 2016). Another stream of response following a YouTube posting of the advertisement was congratulatory and positive about the style and richness of the advertisement and how it transformed the arid Barossa Valley into a mysterious and alluring destination (In Daily, 2021). This has also been noted elsewhere in discussions of tourism, gastronomy and local geographies (Peace, 2006; Thompson and Prideaux, 2019). A third stream of response following a posting on social media was mixed and included both positive and negative responses (Gruen, 2021).

Clearly, there is some variation in response. We can assume that this advertisement may be a dialogic text with several possible readings which entertain and engage one group in the audience, and outrage and revolt another group (Bakhtin, 2010). As such, it utilises cultural references which resonate in the mind of the audience. For example, the title of the theme song, *Red Right Hand*, refers to the potential actions of a vengeful god wrecked upon the innocent in Milton’s poem, *Paradise Lost*. There are also coded references in Nick Cave’s original promotional video for this song to Charles Laughton’s film, *Night of the Hunter* (McEvoy, 2007). The uniting theme is that of the vengeful stranger who comes to town to inflict justice and chaos on the unwary, which is also a common theme in Westerns such as *Shane* and *Unforgiven*. These themes are reinforced by the stark landscape of the Barossa Valley as presented in the advertisement. Pagan and Christian elements supporting these narrative tropes of apocalypse and redemption have also been identified (Boer, 2010;

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)		
							Lower	Upper	
Step 1 ^a	-0.028	0.022	1.589	1	0.208	0.973	0.932	1.015	Visual elements
	-0.011	0.016	0.468	1	0.494	0.989	0.959	1.021	Song
	0.033	0.019	2.849	1	0.091	1.033	0.995	1.074	Destination
	-0.007	0.016	0.176	1	0.675	0.993	0.962	1.026	Food and drinks
	0.043	0.021	4.117	1	0.042	1.044	1.001	1.088	Lifestyle shown
	-0.015	0.01	2.082	1	0.149	0.985	0.966	1.005	Distasteful
	-0.063	0.826	0.006	1	0.94	0.939			Constant

Note(s): a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: visual elements, song, destination, food and drinks, lifestyle shown, distasteful

Source(s): Table from the results of the study by authors

Table 3. Regression analysis

Kouvaras *et al.*, 2008). While these aspects make it a very odd choice for a soundtrack to a destination marketing advertisement, it works paradoxically by juxtaposing the dark noirish lyrics to the semiotic excess of the imagery in a sustained spirit of irony. It can be suggested that the two central themes are redemption, which is carried by the song and reinvigoration through new experiences which are delivered by the visual elements in the text. These two work themes work in counterpoint to lead the viewer towards the idea of the journey to the Barossa as a preferred tourism destination. While there has been a history of powerful Australian tourism advertisements, this one is unique in that it blends such incongruous material together in such an effective way.

The advertisement used as the sample text in this study was well regarded enough in the industry to receive an award at the Cannes Film Festival (Luckman, 2015). The response to the advertisement from the Southeast Asian sample in this study demonstrates that the advertisement also functions well with international audiences who have little or no familiarity with the subject context. This is because it encourages them to visit the destination by emphasising the lifestyle attributes that they might find attractive. This coheres with previous research which identifies the importance of lifestyle in marketing tourism destinations in South Australia (Gross *et al.*, 2008). The attractions of the gourmet lifestyle portrayed in the advertisement are more powerful than limitations due to cultural differences, religious belief and dietary preferences. This is not to say that cultural differences did not play a part. With the Southeast Asian audience, there is a familial, collectivist and feminine-oriented culture which is orientated towards experiencing quality rather than quantity attributes (Dutta and Islam, 2016; Hofstede, 2011). These elements were all demonstrated in the advertisement which portrayed a young family enjoying idyllic rural scenery and gourmet food. The appeals of these scenes transcend suggestions that people will only respond to figures in an advertisement who come from similar cultural backgrounds (Aitken *et al.*, 2008; Forbes-Bell *et al.*, 2020).

Discussion

As previously mentioned, this may appear as a somewhat contradictory group to use, but it has been suggested that advertisers should consider the non-target market as well as the target market (Anstey and Bull, 2010; Brumbaugh and Grier, 2013). Sometimes the non-target market can show unexpected response to a product and become bigger than the target market. Advertisements which orient too strongly towards a particular ethnicity can inhibit appeal to other segments (Forehand and Deshpandé, 2001). To explore this aspect further, this study is researching the effect of a campaign on the non-target market. This sample allowed the establishment of a base line of unconditioned response, since 87% of respondents had not heard of the Barossa Valley before viewing the advertisement. Similarly, as business students, it was unlikely that any of them would have had formal training in semiotics or film interpretation at university level. These factors made this a good group for determining unconditioned response to the advertisement. It was expected that certain cultural references may have worked differently for them given the consumption of pork and alcohol featured in the advertisement. What emerged was quite unexpected, with approximately two-thirds of respondents being favourable towards elements of lifestyle, food and drink displayed, liking the destination, the song, the visual elements and look of the advertisement. Just over one-third of respondents found elements in the advertisement distasteful.

The research questions have been addressed by using quantitative and qualitative approaches framed by interpretative discourse based on critical reception to the advertisement. The first question that sought to determine which elements of the advertisement have encouraged positive response towards the Barossa Valley as a preferred destination, has produced the clear answer of lifestyle as the main attractor via regression analysis.

The second question addressed the way that elements of this advertisement relate to each other to influence the preference for the Barossa Valley as a destination. This was only partially answered by the positive directionality of destination in the regression analysis. The qualitative analysis via NVivo suggested that those who had a positive response were also more likely to verbalise this in words and phrases which afforded greater potential for connotation and conceptual connection. To do this, they used longer sentences and phrases. Positive responses to the advertisement were linked to more extensive descriptions and more complex expressions of why they liked the advertisement. These included descriptions of a family travelling to a destination to enjoy good food and wine and get back to nature.

Those who had a negative response were more likely to use language which afforded denotation and literal meaning. This could be taken as reflecting visceral reactions to aspects of the advertisement that they did not like such as the insects, the meat and the dirt and dust. Short simple phrases and single-word answers characterised this kind of response. There also seemed to be less variety in the types of words used. If a respondent liked the advertisement, they tended to put more effort into saying why, and if they disliked it, they put less effort into saying why. There was more verbal differentiation in positive responses than there was in negative responses. What seems to have emerged from this analysis of response is that negative response is more immediate and disengaging, whereas positive response is delayed and engaging. When respondents react negatively, they withdraw, and when they react positively they engage.

The third question concerning gender was answered via comparison of the means, and it was found that gender was not significant in determining whether or not a respondent would choose this destination for a holiday.

The overarching question which concerned how semiotics be integrated into the process of determining audience response in a marketing and tourism-centric context has been to some degree answered by the methodology demonstrated in this paper. It is suggested that empirical methods such as regression and qualitative analysis of language response can be used in conjunction with interpretative frameworks such as semiotics (Eco, 1979; Elam, 2003). Similar methods can be applied by market researchers to understand, speculate about or evaluate the impact of their advertisement campaigns in contrasting contexts (Chandler, 2005; Mick, 1986; Raber and Budd, 2003).

Conclusion

While this study was aimed at determining response to an advertisement in terms of engagement with semiotic process, the survey instrument limited response to the identification of basic elements rather than determining the way that these elements worked together to create meaning. Audience affects could be elicited in terms of summary statements and potential decision to visit the destination. Advertisement is a genre which presents choices to audiences. While the mechanism of semiotic response may be complex, the expression of that choice in marketing is relatively simple and manifests itself as consumer purchase decisions or statements of intent to purchase. This study and its findings should be of interest to organisations who market tourism destinations (Ritchie, 2000).

Implications and future directions

This approach demonstrates how semiotics can be used to explain the way that advertising works. It suggests that a non-target market for advertising can be quite receptive if an advertisement is well constructed and uses catchy visual and acoustic appeals. This implies that some advertising campaigns can be continued in other markets after the target market campaign has finished. The potential of this approach has become more obvious in the post-

Covid environment where global tourism is now recovering. Return on investment for an advertising budget is always a critical factor in a promotion. Given that cost consideration will be a large part of the campaign, lower cost alternatives like social media can be used to amplify and extend marketing campaigns in areas with rapid internet uptake (Ghosal and Chatterjee, 2014). Going further, a greater understanding of semiotics might reinforce other areas of marketing endeavour such as social marketing approaches (Basu et al., 2021). Further research with audiences who were trained in semiotics and other types of reception theory would be needed to determine deeper levels of connection and interpretation. This could be done either in pedagogical contexts or in focus groups.

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