

## A Semiotic Exploration of the "Reflect Your Respect" Infographic: Navigating Cultural Values in the 2022 FIFA World Cup

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the diverse connotations of Qatar's "ReflectYourRespect" infographic, a poster released before the 2022 FIFA World Cup to showcase the nation's cultural and religious values. Using semiotic analysis, the study examines the poster's various meanings and their potential for varied interpretations between local and international audiences. Through the lenses of Charles Sanders Peirce's and Roland Barthes' semiotic frameworks, the research analyzes the types of signs used and their underlying connotations. The study finds that the interpretations of the infographic may differ and it might lead to cultural misunderstanding.

### Keywords

Qatar World Cup 2022; Infographic Poster; Semiotic Analysis; Peirce's Model; Barthes' Model.

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### Introduction

The use of the semiotic resources in images used in International gatherings like the Olympic Games and the World Cup offers a chance to showcase cultural beliefs<sup>1</sup>, yet it can cause a cultural misunderstanding, leading to a communication breakdown. On

one hand, these gatherings bring individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds together, establishing a stage for cross-cultural interaction and comprehension. Through the use of the semiotic resources within communication tools, host nations can use these events to exhibit their cultural values and beliefs to a

worldwide audience. A case in point is the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, where Brazil emphasized its affection for samba music and dance, along with its favour for soccer<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, these tools might lead to even an international controversy within a particular context, if it is not treated with sensitivity to cultural differences. As a point in case, the 2022 world cup in Qatar raised concerns across the world about many points due to the specific use of the semiotic resources during the event campaign . This is due to the fact that the members of different cultures participating in these events do not have the same interpretations of the images<sup>3</sup>. For this reason, these events can also spread stereotypes and contribute to cultural misunderstandings if not presented carefully.

In connection to the use of images, however, it is worth mentioning that the cultural differences between the context in which an image is created and the context in which it is presented can greatly affect its interpretation. This might be the case with the world cup 2022 infographic poster held in Qatar, which is named “Reflect Your Respect”, and which is created by Qatari designers and interpreted by people from all over the world.

The 2022 FIFA World Cup which was organized in Qatar was an exceptional opportunity for the country to export its cultural beliefs to the world. Through the infographic poster titled “Reflect Your Respect” and spread on social media, largely on twitter and Instagram, through a hashtag carrying the same title, Qatar aimed to sometimes invite people participating in the event to, yet in other times to impose on them respecting its religion and traditions, though under the umbrella term ‘culture’. Containing a list of instructions oriented to the audience and aiming to identify the restricted behaviors that should be avoided during the event many countries received the campaign and the poster negatively. The poster’s messages, inappropriately created and interpreted due to inappropriate use of the semiotic resources, were judged as restricting freedom, leading to worldwide reactions. Therefore, our main concern in this study is to identify the possible meanings contained in the poster and perceived and interpreted by different people based on semiotic analysis which involves the study of signs and their meanings, and it can be used to analyze all types of visual images, including paintings, photographs, and films<sup>4</sup>.

To explore this issue, we try to answer the following research questions:

1. What semiotic resource are used in the “ReflectYourRespect” infographic poster?
2. What connotative meanings does the poster entail?
3. Could they be interpreted appropriately by the non-Qatari people?

To answer these questions, we put forward the following hypotheses:

1. The resources used in the poster belongs to the Qatari culture.
2. Foreigners would not grasp the meaning intended through the poster.

### Literature Review

The image, a form visual communication<sup>5</sup> (Chung and Kwon, 2019), is a powerful tool for conveying information and shaping attitudes and behaviours<sup>6</sup> (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2018) as its use makes messages more engaging and memorable, and helps in presenting complex data in a clear and concise manner<sup>7</sup> (Sawyer, 2018). For example, advertising campaigns often use images to create associations and emotions that are linked to products or services<sup>8</sup> (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Moreover, visual

communication can help bridge language barriers and connect people from different cultures and backgrounds. This is because images and other visual elements can be easily understood by people from all over the world, regardless of their language skills<sup>9</sup> (Bryant & Oliver, 2009).

The semiotic resources within the image can be used to create and communicate connotative meanings that reinforce cultural beliefs and norms<sup>10</sup> (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). Furthermore, through the use of signs and images that are familiar and meaningful within a particular culture, communicators can create a sense of shared understanding among individuals of that culture (ibid). In many cultures, certain signs are included in images to align with endorsed values or ideas. For example, in most culture, the flags are involved in the creation of images to represent patriotism and national pride<sup>11</sup> (Patriarca, 2015), which are second order meanings i.e, connotative meanings<sup>12and 13</sup> (Hmjslev, 1961 and Barthe, 1972).

Theses connotative meaning are created within images when symbols incorporate icons or indexes, transferring first order meanings (firstness in Peirce<sup>14</sup> (1998) terms or denotation in Hmjslev<sup>12</sup> (1961)) into second order menings

(secondness or connotation). This is why the connotative meanings of any image are complex and can be interpreted in several ways<sup>15</sup> (Ali, 2005). This is very likely in the sample of our study and therefore it is worth exploring the interconnection between signs and meanings in the world cup events.

### **Research Methodology and Study Design**

The research design for this study involves a qualitative research method, specifically a semiotic analysis. The semiotic analysis involves examining the signs and symbols used in the Reflect your Respect infographic poster for the World Cup Qatar 2022, in order to understand the intended meanings and symbolic messages embedded in the infographic poster.

### **Description of the Infographic Poster**

Leading up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the Qatari Center for Voluntary Activities and the Qatari Women Association launched the "Reflect Your Respect" campaign. The goal was to foster an atmosphere of respect, fair play, and tolerance among everyone involved in the

tournament, including fans, players, and officials.

The campaign's core message was communicated through a series of eight infographic posters. These posters employed a visually striking yet simple design, utilizing color, imagery, and symbols to effectively convey the importance of respect. Each poster highlighted a different facet of respectful behavior, such as respecting opponents, adhering to rules, treating fans well, and upholding the integrity of the game. The overarching themes of tolerance and fair play were also emphasized, reinforcing their significance both within the context of sports and in everyday life.

### **Data Collection:**

The infographic poster presented by the "Reflect your Respect" campaign sparked on the official page of Qatari Center for Voluntary Activities and the Qatari Women Association on Instagram and Twitter is the content we analyzed in this study. The infographic poster is shown in figure 01:

Figure 01

Reflect your Respect Infographic Poster



### Analysis Procedures

This study delves into the "Reflect Your Respect" infographic poster using semiotic analysis, employing the theoretical lenses of Charles Sanders Peirce and Roland Barthes. The analysis began by visually deconstructing the poster into its smallest meaningful units, identifying individual signs, and categorizing them using Peirce's framework of symbolic, iconic, and indexical signs.

Beyond simple identification, the study sought to interpret both the overt and underlying meanings embedded within the poster's visuals and text. This involved uncovering potential cultural and mythical references that the design might evoke,

revealing layers of meaning beyond the surface.

Recognizing the interplay between visuals and language, the analysis also examined the specific role of linguistic signs within the poster. The focus was on understanding how the textual elements interacted with the imagery to solidify or anchor specific connotative meanings.




### Results: Data Analysis and Findings

Images 1 through 8 included in the previous infographic poster and analysed in tables 1 through 8 below exhibit the rely on the interplay between iconic and symbolic signs to create the connotative meanings. All images include circle with a diagonal bar and the black and red colour that signifies prohibition in driving code.

Brought to this context and combined with the iconic sign in all images except image 3 (dissected in table 2) where it combines with another symbolic sign, the signs create new meanings that can be interpreted

differently by people visiting Qatar to attend the event. To get a clear idea of how meaning is created, it is better to go through each image individually.

**Table 01: Alcohol Prohibition**

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Iconic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	Bottle and glass	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colours



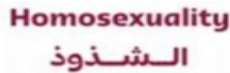

The first image, segmented in table 1 incorporates iconic signs that is manifested in the form of a bottle and a glass. This iconic sign combines, in addition to the circle, the bar and the red and black colours, with the linguistic sign presented in two distinct languages, Arabic and English. This is vested in the Arabic text "شرب الكحول" roughly translated to "drinking alcohol. Thus, among a range of connotative meanings that compete each other within the figure if it is decontextualized such as health consciousness, morality, legal

consequences, and the mythical background<sup>16</sup>, only the latter which is tied to broader cultural or religious beliefs and myths as being "haram" (forbidden) could be nominated in the context of the world cup 2022 in Qatar. This is due to the role of the linguistic sign "Drinking alcohol", written in Arabic and English, which serves to prompt the meaning that what is prohibited is alcohol, not any other liquid, the overall meaning of the image can be figured out by the viewer. Thus, this combination of the linguistic and the non-linguistic signs succeeded in eliminating

any ambiguity about the subject of the prohibition in this image, ensuring that viewers understand the message of the

image, regardless of their familiarity with the symbols and cultural context.

**Table 1:** *Disapproval of Homosexuality*

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Symbolic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	Two male gender symbols	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colour





Alongside the prohibition sign (a circle with a cross) and the symbolic colours, black and red, the second image introduces a pair of intertwined male gender symbols, each signified by a circle with an arrow extending from its edge, which has traditionally been accepted as a conventional symbol for the male gender. These two symbolic signs combined together would mean for instance that two men sitting, walking, eating ...etc is prohibited. They would invoke even more serious cultural debates regarding disapproval of homosexuality, LGBTQ+ discrimination and the mythical background of condemning same-sex

relationships<sup>17</sup>. However, by incorporating the linguistic sign within the image, the intended message becomes apparent. This linguistic sign written into both languages, Arabic and English, the Arabic text which literally means abnormality and the English text homosexuality which refers to the quality of the characteristic of being sexually attracted to peoples of the same gender. Generally, the term "Homosexuality" written in English and translated into Arabic acts as an anchor, ensuring that the viewer interprets the visual signs as relating to homosexuality, thus reinforcing the rejection of homosexuality during the event. It is worth

mentioning however that the meaning of the word الشذوذ is abroad in Arabic as it can be used to describe abnormal anything.

Thus using the expression "الشذوذ الجنسي" is more accurate and appropriate.





Table 2: Immodesty

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Iconic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	Exposed legs in a cross-legged pose	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colour

The image depicts a woman's legs in a cross-legged position. Jointly with the symbolic circle, many denotative and connotative meanings are created (signified). As for the connotative meanings which are our interest, the combination might mean indecency, violation of modesty standards, freedom and comfort and mythical background of warning against behaviour that violates cultural or religious norms of dressing<sup>15</sup>.

The linguistic sign “Immodesty” plays a crucial role in conveying the image’s overall meaning. It anchors the meaning by emphasising the importance of modesty and suggests that the image is intended to convey a warning against immodest behaviour. The use of Arabic in addition to English suggests that the image may be targeted towards a specific audience that values modesty and adherence to cultural or religious norms.





Table 3: Profanity

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Iconic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	Angry man his mouth opened	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colour

The fourth graphic portrays a furious man and arbitrary symbols floating above him. The depiction's similarity to a human in reality renders this iconic sign. The image also presents a linguistic sign penned in both Arabic and English. The Arabic inscription reads "الألفاظ الخادشة" translating to profanity and inappropriate speech. This meaning is echoed in the English text, mirroring the Arabic interpretation. The denotative meaning is not straightforward. It might portray an angry man producing either inappropriate or unrecognisable speech, a man who is shouting... etc. Whatever the man is doing is unacceptable

as the red circle with a diagonal bar signifies prohibition. Accordingly, the image encodes many potential connotative meanings such as respectful communication, social norms, morality and ethics and the mythical background of the unacceptance of profane behaviours<sup>18</sup>. The linguistic sign at the bottom of the image however anchors the polysemy of the image to the profanity context and therefore reinforces only one signified meaning, which is indicating that the content is of a profane nature. suggesting that the content is not only prohibited but also potentially harmful.





**Table 4: Respecting Places of Worship**

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Iconic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	A person laughing and pointing his hand at a mosque	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colour

Through iconic signs, the fifth image depicts a human being, the first iconic sign, standing, laughing, and pointing towards a mosque, which is the second iconic sign connoting places of worship. The image also includes a linguistic sign composed in Arabic and English. The Arabic inscription, "عدم احترام الأماكن المقدسة" represents a disregard for sacred sites. Similarly, the English text indicates a lack of reverence for places of worship. The denotative meaning of this image is not straightforward as well. The image shows a person pointing at a mosque, which suggests disrespect for the place of worship. The red circle with the diagonal bar emphasizes the prohibition of such behaviours.

Thus, this image calls for many more complex connotative meanings which can be interpreted in several ways<sup>19</sup>. First, the image represents an act of bigotry or intolerance people attending the event might show towards a particular religion or culture. Second, the image could be interpreted as a critique of religious institutions. However, given the clear message of the linguistic sign at the bottom of the image, this interpretation is unlikely. Alternatively, the linguistic sign clears the ambiguous of the image by moving its meaning from being an act of disrespect to a warning against disrespecting religious institutions.





**Table 5: Loud Music and Sounds**

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Iconic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	A man talking on megaphone	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colour

Sign 1 in the image is an iconic sign that depicts a human who is standing and speaking into a megaphone producing loud sounds. Represented in such iconic way and combined with the red circle and the diagonal bar, they form a new sign that emphasizes the prohibition of such behaviours. However, the source of this loud sound is unclear and many connotations can be understood. These are complex and can be interpreted in several ways. The image could be seen as an act of disturbance to others or as a negative attitude towards modern technology and its influence on social interactions. The

potential meaning however can only be deduced through anchoring the message though the linguistic sign written in Arabic and translates into English. The inscription "الموسيقى الصاخبة والأصوات العالية" translates to loud and high voices, which is closely pairs to the meaning of the presented English text "loud music and sounds". Thus, the whole message is the explicit message which is loud music and high bits and voices are prohibited. In simpler words, the linguistic sign clarifies the message moving it from being an act of disturbance to a warning against producing loud music and sounds.



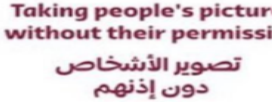

Table 6: Dating

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Iconic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	Standing male and female with heart in between	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colour

The seventh image exhibits a small heart placed between an iconic sign of a man and woman standing close to each other. The tiny heart between them may signify the relationship between them, an act of love, yet unclear what kind of love. It is for this reason that many interpretations can be given to the image. The connotative meanings of this image are more complex and can be interpreted in several ways<sup>15</sup>. First, it can be interpreted as a restriction of romantic relationships due to traditional

social norms and values. Second, it can be interpreted as a reflection of contemporary societal values that promote individual freedom and autonomy in choosing romantic partners. The use of the banner (the circle) along with linguistic sign "Dating" clarifies that the image is not warning against romantic relationships but rather against the act of dating in the Qatari context. (There is much to say about this point in the discussion section).

**Table 7: Taking People's Photos Without their Permission**

	Sign 01	Sign 02	Sign 03	Sign 04
<b>Sign</b>				
<b>Type of Sign</b>	Iconic	Symbolic	Linguistic	Symbolic
<b>Description</b>	Man half reclining and holding camera	Circle with a diagonal bar	Text written in Arabic and translated into English	Red and Black Colour

The image (sign1 in the table) portrays a partially reclining man clutching a camera. Besides, the symbolic and iconic signs, the image also includes a bilingual sign scripted in English and Arabic. The Arabic inscription "تصوير الأشخاص دون إذنهم" translates to capturing people's photos without their consent, which aligns perfectly with the literal interpretation of the accompanying English text. The denotative meaning of this image is a warning against taking people's pictures without their permission. The red circle with the diagonal bar emphasizes the prohibition of such behaviour. The person holding a camera suggests that this image is specifically targeting individuals who take pictures of people without their consent. The connotative meanings of this image can

be interpreted in different ways. First, the image can be seen as a reminder of the importance of respecting people's privacy and personal space. The linguistic sign "Taking people's Pictures without their Permission" highlights the issue of consent, and the image serves as a visual reminder of the importance of obtaining permission before taking pictures. Second, the image could be interpreted as a critique of contemporary culture's obsession with documenting and sharing every moment of our lives. The person holding the camera represents the urge to capture every moment, even if it means invading someone's privacy. The red prohibition sign serves as a reminder to slow down and be more mindful of our actions.

### Discussion

The use of the semiotic resources in images used in international gatherings like the Olympic Games and the World Cup offers a chance to showcase cultural beliefs, yet it can cause a cultural misunderstanding, leading to a communication breakdown. These tools might lead to even an international controversy within a particular context<sup>1</sup>, if it is not treated with sensitivity to cultural differences. While using some resources that belong to the Qatari culture would create and transform many connotative meanings that would be interpreted by people from around the world and therefore, many of these meanings, particularly those that include a typically religious or tradition related terms might not be interpreted appropriately. Addressing this issue, the analysis of the “Reflect Your Respect” infographic poster yielded significant results regarding the semiotic resource used, the connotative meanings it entails, and interpreted appropriately by the non-Qatari people.

As for the use of the semiotic resources and how they work together, the “Reflect Your Respect” poster designer used both linguistic and visual signs. Most of them are iconic while few are symbolic: All images that form the poster and that are segmented in tables 1 through 8 incorporate iconic

signs that vary from one poster to another according to the final message of the image while the symbolic signs precisely the circle, the bar and the red and black colours are common to the 8 images. The iconic and symbolic signs combine with the linguistic signs that encompass the use of utterances that are scripted in Arabic and translated into English. This is common to the eight images that the infographic poster includes. Therefore, as the symbolic signs are inspired from the driving code which have a fixed meaning across all cultures and which is ‘prohibition’, the meaning encoded in the images through the iconic signs, linguistic and visual, is interpreted as being prohibited.

Therefore, any cultural misunderstanding is the result of the misinterpretation of the meaning created through combining these iconic signs, visual and linguistic, due to ambiguity. This is likely since the translation of the linguistic sign Arabic into English is not accurate in some images as it does not transfer the meaning intended through Arabic due to cultural differences<sup>3</sup> and <sup>1</sup>. Image number 07 is a good example. In this image, dating is not a prohibited relationship in western societies. The Arabic inscription "العلاقات المحرمة" translates directly to forbidden

relationships, while the English text "Dating" refers to romantic interactions between two individuals. Therefore, the ambiguity in this image is not set off as it is not treated with sensitivity to cultural differences. Likewise, what might be considered as a profanity in one society is not in another. Therefore, images number 5 deconstructed in table 4 is also still ambiguous

Due to this misinterpretation of the linguistic sign, the readers of the poster might not grasp the meaning connoted through the images. Each of the 8 images invokes a range of connotative meanings, only one of which is potential. To identify this potential meaning which is generally intended by the campaign designer, the reader relies on the anchor, the linguistic sign. Yet, the later does not always function appropriately as it does not stimulate in the mind of the reader the appropriate meaning initially intended by the Qatari designer. As examples, we can refer to image 5 deconstructed in table 4, image 7 decomposed in table 6 and image 8 decomposed in table 7.

### **Conclusion**

While the semiotic resources used in the infographic poster spread by Qatar during the world cup 2022 succeeded in

transferring the Qatari values to the world, they invoked some misinterpretations and therefore cross cultural communication issues. Many of the symbolic and iconic resources, visual and linguistic, and the connotative meanings they invoked are many and universal. Only one meaning among them can be nominated within the Qatari cultural contexts. The Qatari individual can decipher all potential meanings encoded through these resources while foreigners may fail in doing so resulting in misinterpretation and therefore in a cultural misunderstanding. This is due to inappropriate use of the linguistic sign that function as an anchor to the visual sign sometimes and to cultural differences in others. Therefore, we recommend campaign designers to pay careful attention to the sensitive use of the semiotic resources.

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