

Genes or Jeans? A Peircean Semiotic Analysis of Co-Occurrence and Dual Interpretation in the “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans” Advertisement

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Abstract. This study examines how co-occurring sign-processes in an advertisement generate multiple interpretations. The object of analysis is the “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans” advertisement released by American Eagle in July 2025. The advertisement attracted widespread public attention because it gave rise to two publicly documented interpretations: a commercial interpretation confirmed by the brand and a biological interpretation associated with eugenics discourse reported in news media. Drawing on Peirce's trichotomies and Bateman's account of co-occurring sign-processes, this study analyzes the verbal and visual elements across four selected segments using a descriptive qualitative approach. The findings show that the ambiguity does not result from the combination or blending of different sign categories into a single sign. Rather, it arises from the co-occurrence of distinct verbal and visual sign-processes in which the phonetic qualisign /dʒi:nz/ is realized as a spoken sinsign capable of instantiating two competing symbolic legisigns, “genes” and “jeans”. These sign-processes enable divergent dynamic interpretants to develop simultaneously.

Keywords: *Advertisement, co-occurrence, Peircean semiotics, trichotomies*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana co-occurring sign-processes dalam sebuah iklan menghasilkan berbagai interpretasi. Objek penelitian adalah iklan “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans” yang dirilis oleh American Eagle pada Juli 2025. Iklan tersebut menarik perhatian luas karena memunculkan dua interpretasi yang terdokumentasi secara publik, yaitu interpretasi komersial yang dikonfirmasi oleh merek dan interpretasi biologis yang dikaitkan dengan wacana eugenika sebagaimana diberitakan oleh media. Dengan menggunakan trikotomi Peirce dan konsep *co-occurring sign-processes* dari Bateman, penelitian ini menganalisis elemen verbal dan visual pada empat segmen terpilih melalui pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ambiguitas tersebut tidak muncul akibat penggabungan atau peleburan kategori tanda yang berbeda ke dalam satu tanda. Sebaliknya, ambiguitas muncul melalui *co-occurrence* proses-proses tanda verbal dan visual yang berbeda, di mana fonetik qualisign /dʒi:nz/ ketika diucapkan secara konkret berfungsi sebagai sinsign yang mampu menginstansiasi dua legisigns yang saling bersaing, yaitu “genes” dan “jeans”. Proses-proses tanda tersebut memungkinkan terbentuknya *dynamic interpretants* yang berbeda secara simultan.

Kata Kunci: *Co-Occurrence, iklan, semiotika Peirce, trikotomi*

INTRODUCTION

Advertisement is one of the most persuasive forms of communication that continues to evolve alongside digital media and visual culture. Advertising carries a message about a product that is intended to be conveyed to its audience, often through forms of

communication that are delivered indirectly rather than explicitly stated (Amelia et al., 2024). These messages are addressed to audiences with the aim of influencing and inviting them to try and eventually purchase the products being offered (Fauzi & Sulaeman, 2023).

The history of global advertising shows that verbal and visual cues in advertisements often trigger unintended interpretations, creating cases where a brand's official message clashes with public perception. This phenomenon is clearly seen in the portrayal of racial discrimination in a Dove ad (Raheem et al., 2024) and the controversy surrounding a Pepsi ad perceived as underestimating social movements (Saqina & Ambarini, 2021). These cases demonstrate that ambiguity in advertisements whether intentional or not often leads to a difference between the creator's original intent and the audience's interpretation as the message's recipients.

American Eagle, a fashion brand that has emphasized self-expression and identity representation since 1977, actively develops strategic marketing campaigns across various international platforms. In 2025, American Eagle launched an advertisement with the tagline "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" featuring actress Sydney Sweeney. This advertisement sparked public discussion and controversy due to the ambiguity created by a combination of verbal wordplay and visual representation. Some viewers interpreted the ad as a subtle reference to the concept of eugenics, while the company claimed that the ad referred purely to their denim products (Chia & Sherman, 2025). This phenomenon illustrates a situation where an advertisement can simultaneously trigger two opposing interpretations, the meaning intended by the brand and the meaning not intended by the brand through a combination of verbal and visual elements.

This publicly documented ambiguity does not come from a single element, but rather from the co-occurrence of several sign processes that simultaneously open the possibility for two conflicting interpretant. The key to this co-occurrence is the homophone /dʒi:nz/, which in this advertisement can be read simultaneously as genes or jeans. The presence of this homophone within the verbal monologue, combined with visual representations highlighting the actress's specific physical traits, creates a condition where two interpretive paths open simultaneously, neither of which can be invalidated. In order to analyze the internal process of creating this multiple meaning systematically, a semiotic analytical framework is needed that can examine how several different sign processes can operate on the same material simultaneously.

Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic framework serves as a relevant analytical tool for analyzing this mechanism. Unlike Saussure's dyadic model, Peirce offers a triadic model that views the process of sign formation as involving three essential elements: the representamen (the physical form of the sign), the object (the referent), and the interpretant (the mental effect or interpretation arising from the sign) (Chandler, 2007). To avoid confusion arising from conflating the signifying element with the entire triadic relation of signification, this study occasionally uses the "sign-vehicle" to refer specifically to the representamen, following (Atkin, 2023) and Bateman (2018). More than just classifying signs into icons, index, and symbols, Peirce's refined system consists of three trichotomies that produce ten classes of signs with tightly interdependent relationships (Bateman, 2018). By applying Peirce's triadic model along with its trichotomies—qualisign, sinsign, legisign; icon, index, symbol; rheme, dicent, argument (Asriningsih & Umayana, 2010), this study offers an approach to understanding how advertisements produce diverse interpretive possibilities, as emphasized by Short (2007).

However, the rheme–dicent–argument trichotomy only describes the logical form that a sign-vehicle presents to interpretation, namely whether it functions as a possibility, a statement, or an argument. This classification alone does not explain why different

interpreters may arrive at different interpretations when confronted with the same sign-vehicle. To explain this, Peirce's semiotics also distinguishes interpretants into three stages: the immediate interpretant, the dynamic interpretant, and the final interpretant. The immediate interpretant refers to the interpretive potential already contained within the sign before any actual interpretation takes place, including the general features of its meaning (Atkin, 2023). According to Peirce (1908, as cited in Atkin, 2023) The dynamic interpretant refers to the actual effect produced on the mind of an interpreter during a particular act of interpretation. Peirce, (1909, as cited in Schmidt, 2022) states that since this effect is produced anew in each act of interpretation, it may differ from one interpreter to another. In contrast, the final interpretant refers to the interpretation that would eventually be reached if the process of interpretation continued until a stable and ultimate understanding was achieved (Atkin, 2023). Following Schmidt (2022), this distinction is not treated as an additional trichotomy that expands Peirce's ten-class sign classifications. Instead, it provides a complementary perspective that explains how semiosis unfolds during the process of interpretation. In this study, the immediate/dynamic/final distinction is used to explain that the commercial and biological readings of the advertisement are not interpretive errors or evidence of mixed sign categories.

Furthermore, since this advertisement is presented in video form, the interaction between its verbal and visual elements should not be understood as a single sign that combines different sign categories. Bateman (2018) argues that although Peirce occasionally describes signs as blending iconic, indexical, and symbolic characters, these statements should be understood as referring to situations where different kinds of signs operate together while remaining categorically distinct. In this sense, co-occurrence refers to the simultaneous operation of two or more categorically distinct sign-processes. Each sign-process has its own representamen, object, and interpretant, even though they may share the same physical material. Rather than merging into a single sign, these sign-processes remain analytically separate while operating simultaneously. Bateman (2018) illustrates this through the example of a footprint in the sand, which supports both an indexical sign-process, as a causal trace of a foot, and an iconic sign-process, through its resemblance to the shape of a foot. Although both processes arise from the same physical trace, each forms a separate semiotic relation with its own object and interpretant. A similar structure can also be found in Scott's analysis of a postage stamp, where a single printed object simultaneously supports an indexical sign-process that certifies postage payment and an iconic sign-process that represents a person or historical event. This study adopts Bateman's concept of co-occurrence in this sense. This understanding of co-occurrence differs from Peircean sign-combination. Whereas sign-combination describes how simpler signs combine to form a compound sign, such as a dicisign, co-occurrence refers to separate sign-processes that operate simultaneously while remaining categorically distinct (Bateman, 2018). It is also distinguished from Kress and Leeuwen's intersemiosis in social semiotics which focuses on how different semiotic modes work together to construct a unified meaning rather than on how categorically distinct sign-processes remain separate while sharing the same material form.

A number of previous studies have examined advertisements as texts rich in symbolic meaning, but most have focused on persuasive strategies, identity construction, or advertisements with relatively straightforward messages in which the verbal and visual elements support a single interpretation. Zakia & Nadin (1987) describe advertisements as the most sophisticated form of communication that strategically combines verbal and visual elements to produce an emotional impact through symbols, myths, and gestures. However,

verbal and visual elements do not always convey aligned meanings. As noted by Kress & Leeuwen (2006), verbal text can carry one set of meanings while visual elements encode different meanings. Several previous studies have applied Peircean semiotics to analyze advertisements and visual communication across various research subjects. Chairunnisa et al. (2025) found that the verbal and visual elements in the Honor of Kings advertisement work together to create a cohesive narrative that strengthens audience engagement. However, the analysis treats the verbal and visual elements as supporting the same intended meaning. The signs are classified using Peirce's trichotomies to explain how they contribute to a unified narrative rather than to examine whether different sign-processes may generate competing interpretations from the same material. As a result, their study does not discuss co-occurrence because the advertisement itself does not produce dynamic interpretant.

Stephanie (2024) showed that the icons, indices, and symbols in the 2020 Indomie Ramadan advertisement communicate product information while also constructing emotional and religious meanings. In this case, the different sign categories are understood as meanings that support one another rather than as categorically distinct sign-processes that produce dynamic interpretants. Fauziyah et al. (2025) show that the semiotic elements in the "Free Palestine" poster function cohesively to communicate a political message, while Syahputri et al. (2025) highlight the dominance of qualisigns and indices in wolf-themed memes. Altogether, these studies confirm the applicability of Peircean semiotics to various forms of visual and verbal media. However, in these studies, the classification itself becomes the final stage of the analysis. The identified signs are used to explain a single coherent meaning that is assumed to be intended by the advertisement or text. None of these studies explains how the same advertisement can generate dynamic interpretant. This is the gap addressed by the present study. Rather than identifying which sign categories are dominant, this study examines how verbal-symbolic and visual-iconic sign-processes can operate simultaneously within the same audiovisual material while remaining categorically distinct.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) identify the trichotomies present in the verbal and visual elements of the "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" advertisement; (2) classify the key elements that produce co-occurrence; and (3) explain how the co-occurrence of these sign classes simultaneously produces dynamic interpretant. To achieve these objectives, this study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, applying Peirce's triadic semiotics as the primary analytical framework.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an interpretive and naturalistic approach that examines phenomena in their natural context to understand meanings constructed through social and cultural representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research relies on extensive data collection from various sources, primarily in the form of words and images, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study. Similarly, Aulawi et al. (2018) emphasize that qualitative research focuses on examining and interpreting observable phenomena within their contexts. This aligns with the objective of this study, which is to explore how the verbal and visual elements in Sydney Sweeney's advertisements simultaneously construct multiple interpretants. The descriptive qualitative method involves the study of an object, condition, or phenomenon in its natural setting rather than in an experimental situation to produce a systematic, factual, and accurate description (Furidha, 2024). Furthermore, Sandelowski (2000, as cited in Furidha, 2024) asserts that this method relies on categorization as the primary process for understanding the phenomenon under study. This approach aligns with the research objective, which is to describe and explain

how the verbal and visual elements in the "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" advertisement construct two contradictory meanings simultaneously through the process of signs.

The primary data source for this study is an advertisement titled "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans," which was officially released by American Eagle on July 23, 2025. Although the original video was later removed by the company following public controversy, the advertisement remains accessible via reuploads on digital platforms. One accessible version is a repost on YouTube published on July 27, 2025, with 777,867 views and 2,047 comments at the time of access. In addition to the video, this study also uses the advertisement's verbal transcript as a secondary data source. The transcript has been reproduced and cited in various online media outlets, including an article published by Sharma (2025), via NDTV Lifestyle. The verification confirmed that the verbal utterances analyzed in this study correspond to the spoken content in the reuploaded video. These utterances include: "Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair color, personality, and even eye color," "My jeans are blue," and "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans."

The data were analyzed through qualitative interpretation based on Peirce's three trichotomies. First, the advertisement was repeatedly observed to identify segments in which the interaction between verbal and visual elements was most relevant to the research objectives. Four segments were then selected through purposive sampling because they contain the key moments where the homophone /dʒi:nz/ is introduced, developed, and reinforced through the simultaneous interaction of verbal and visual sign-processes. The interval between 0:05 and 0:10 was not analyzed as a separate segment because it does not introduce new verbal or visual sign-processes relevant to the study, but rather continues the sign-processes established in the surrounding segments. After the segments were selected, the verbal and visual elements in each segment were classified separately according to Peirce's three trichotomies. The classified signs were then analyzed collectively to identify instances of co-occurrence. All analyses were conducted by the researcher as part of the descriptive qualitative approach adopted in this study.

The limitations of this study must be explicitly acknowledged. First, as a single case study, the findings are not intended to be generalized. Second, this analysis is conducted from the researcher's perspective as an external observer, not from the perspective of the actual audience, therefore, the identified interpretant is a possible interpretant based on the sign structure, not an interpretant verified through audience response studies. Third, since the original video has been deleted by the company, the video data relies on third-party reuploads whose visual quality may not be identical to the original version.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the semiotic analysis of the "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" advertisement. The analysis is organized into two parts. The first part identifies and classifies the verbal and visual sign-processes in each segment according to Peirce's three trichotomies. The second part examines how these distinct sign-processes co-occur throughout the advertisement and explains how their interaction gives rise to two different dynamic interpretants.

Trichotomies Classification of Visual and Verbal Elements

The identified signs are analyzed separately according to their visual and verbal elements. This approach allows each sign to be identified and analyzed independently before exploring how the co-occurrence contributes to meaning-making within the advertisement.

Table 1. Trichotomies Classification of Visual Elements

Segment	Element	1st Trichotomy	2nd Trichotomy	3rd Trichotomy
0:00-0:02	Blue denim texture	Qualisign	Icon	Rheme
	Jeans as concrete object	Sinsign	Icon	Rheme
0:03-0:05	Sydney's blonde hair	Sinsign	Icon	Rheme
	Denim	Sinsign	Icon	Rheme
0:10-0:11	Sydney's blue eyes	Sinsign	Icon	Rheme
	Sydney's blonde hair	Sinsign	Icon	Rheme
0:12-0:14	Written text "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans"	Legisign	Symbol	Dicent

The classifications presented in Table 1 demonstrate how the visual signs function independently within Peirce's trichotomies framework. However, because the advertisement also relies heavily on spoken language, examining the visual element alone is insufficient to explain the emergence of multiple interpretations. The analysis therefore continues with the verbal elements presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Trichotomies Classification of Verbal Elements

Segment	Element	1st Trichotomy	2nd Trichotomy	3rd Trichotomy
0:00-0:02	Sound /dʒi:nz/	Qualisign	Icon	Rheme
	/dʒi:nz/ as biological 'genes'	Legisign	Symbol	Rheme
	/dʒi:nz/ as product 'jeans'	Legisign	Symbol	Rheme
0:03-0:05	'hair color' referring to blonde	Legisign	Symbol	Rheme
0:10-0:11	Spoken utterance "My /dʒi:nz/ are blue"	Legisign	Symbol	Dicent
0:12-0:14	Spoken tagline "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans"	Legisign	Symbol	Dicent

The following figures present the four selected segments of the advertisement to provide a clearer understanding of the classifications presented in Tables 1 and 2. Each figure is analyzed by examining the visual and verbal elements that appear within the same segment and explaining their classifications according to Peirce's trichotomies framework.

Following Bateman's (2018) interpretation of Peirce, a qualisign cannot be directly perceived because it exists only as an abstract quality. In this study, the phonetic form /dʒi:nz/ is therefore treated as a *qualisign*. It becomes perceptible only when it is realized in an actual utterance. Each time Sydney Sweeney pronounces /dʒi:nz/ in the advertisement,

the sound functions as a *sinsign* because it is a concrete occurrence of that phonetic quality. At the same time, the utterance is recognized as an English word because it instantiates a conventional linguistic type, namely a *legisign*. Since /dʒi:nz/ is a homophone, the same spoken *sinsign* may simultaneously instantiate two different symbolic *legisigns* available in English: genes and jeans. The ambiguity therefore arises from the two possible legisigns replicated by the same spoken occurrence, rather than from any change in the sign category of the sound itself.



Fig 1. Segment 1 (0:00-0:02)

The first segment is taken from timestamp 0:00–0:02, as shown in Figure 1. In this segment, the advertisement presents a close-up shot of the denim texture worn by Sydney Sweeney. Simultaneously, Sydney Sweeney says, “Genes are passed down from parents to offspring.” The word *genes* is a homophone of *jeans*, as both are pronounced /dʒi:nz/, despite referring to different concepts.

Based on Figure 1 and the data presented in Tables 1 and 2, the opening sequence of the advertisement simultaneously introduces visual and verbal elements. From a visual perspective, the blue denim texture initially functions as a *qualisign* because it presents certain perceptible visual qualities. However, as an actual visual occurrence within the advertisement, it also functions as a *sinsign*. Once the texture is recognized as part of an actual pair of jeans, the visual element functions as a *sinsign*. In relation to its object, the visual sign operates *iconically* because of its direct visual resemblance to the product.

At the same time, the verbal element, realized through spoken utterance, introduces the sound /dʒi:nz/. The phonetic quality /dʒi:nz/ as a *qualisign*, because it is perceived only as an auditory quality and operates *iconically* through this phonetic resemblance. When Sydney Sweeney actually pronounces the word, it functions as a *sinsign*. Since the same sound is shared by both *genes* and *jeans*, and remains a *rheme*, as no definite interpretation has yet been established. Because the spoken form is homophonous, this same *sinsign* may function as two *legisigns* because the interpretation of /dʒi:nz/ as either *genes* (genetics) or *jeans* (a clothing product) relies entirely on the conventions of the English language; and classified as a *symbol*. At this initial stage, the sound does not direct viewers toward a single definite meaning but instead opens up multiple interpretive possibilities. Consequently, the verbal sign is categorized as a *rheme*. Therefore, when examined independently during the first two seconds of the advertisement, the verbal element belongs to the class of *rhematic-symbolic-legisign*, as its meaning remains highly ambiguous before being further clarified through its interaction with the visual element.



Fig 2. Segment 2 (0:03-0:05)

Figure 2 presents the continuation of the advertisement at timestamp 0:03–0:05. In this segment, Sydney Sweeney becomes more visibly prominent on screen, with one of her most distinctive physical features, her blonde hair which is clearly displayed. At the same time, she continues her narration by stating, “often determining traits like hair color, personality, and even eye color.”

Referring to Figure 2 and the data detailed in Tables 1 and 2, the visual dimension of this sequence demonstrates an expansion compared to the previous segment. The first visual element is Sydney Sweeney’s blonde hair, which appears as a concrete *sinsign* on screen. This physical characteristic functions as an *icon* because it visually resembles her actual physical appearance. At this stage, however, the sign remains at the level of *rheme*, as it merely suggests possible interpretations related to genetic identity or other biological traits associated with the individual being portrayed. In addition, the denim garment remains visible within the camera frame as another concrete *sinsign*. Similar to the preceding segment, the denim functions as an *icon* because it visually represents the jeans worn by Sydney Sweeney. Nevertheless, when examined independently, this sign also remains within the category of *rheme*, as its meaning has not yet become fully determinate and continues to allow for multiple interpretive possibilities.

Simultaneously, the verbal element, realized through spoken utterance, introduces the phrase “hair color,” which corresponds to the blonde hair visually presented on screen. When considered independently from the visual mode, this verbal sign is governed by the conventions of the English language and therefore function as *legisign*. The relationship between the phrase “hair color” and the concept of hair color in the real world is entirely based on linguistic convention; therefore, the sign is classified as a *symbol*. At this stage of the partial analysis, the meaning conveyed by the phrase remains open-ended and does not yet point to a single, fixed interpretation. Consequently, the verbal element is categorized as a *rhematic-symbolic-legisign*, as the sign it produces continues to invite multiple possible interpretations.



Fig 3. Segment 3 (0:10-0:11)

Figure 3 presents a segment of the advertisement at timestamp 0:10–0:11, where the camera shifts its focus toward Sydney Sweeney’s face. In this segment, visual attention is directed primarily to her biological features, particularly her blue eyes (Sydney’s blue eyes), which look directly into the camera, and her blonde hair (Sydney’s blonde hair). Accompanying this visual display, Sydney Sweeney delivers the line, “My jeans are blue.”

Compared to the preceding segment, the visual emphasis in this sequence extends beyond the denim product itself and begins to foreground the model’s biological attributes. Sydney Sweeney’s blue eyes and blonde hair appear on screen as concrete *sinsigns* that can be directly observed by viewers. Both features function as *icons* because they faithfully resemble the model’s actual physical appearance. At this stage of the analysis, however, these visual signs remain within the category of *rheme*, as they merely suggest potential meanings associated with biological identity or genetic traits rather than conveying a definite conclusion.

Meanwhile, the verbal element is realized through the spoken utterance “My /dʒi:nz/ are blue.” When analyzed separately from the visual element, the utterance functions as a *legisign* based on the conventions of the English language and is therefore classified as a *symbol*. As a complete proposition, the utterance conveys factual information that an entity referred to as /dʒi:nz/ possesses the attribute “blue.” However, because the homophonic sound /dʒi:nz/ may still refer to either genes or jeans when considered independently, the specific referent remains unresolved at this stage. Nevertheless, since the utterance itself constitutes a complete proposition, the verbal sign is classified as a *dicent-symbolic-legisign*.

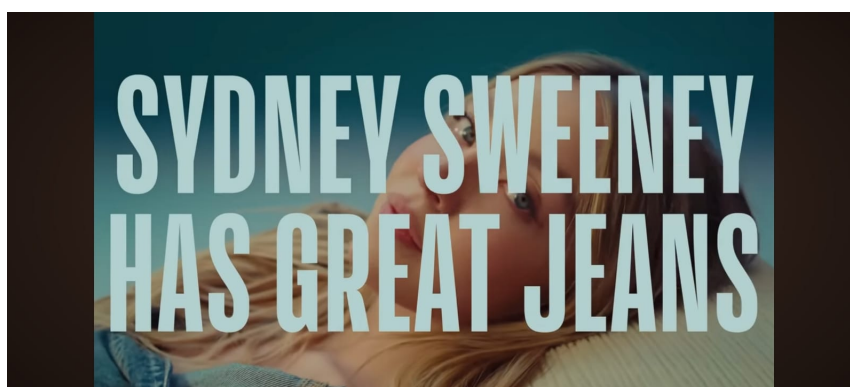


Fig 4. Segment 4 (0:12-0:14)

Figure 4 presents the concluding segment of the advertisement at timestamp 0:12–0:14. In this segment, a large typographic tagline, “SYDNEY SWEENEY HAS GREAT JEANS,” is superimposed over Sydney Sweeney’s face. Simultaneously, a narrator delivers the same tagline through the voiceover, bringing together the visual and verbal elements established throughout the advertisement.

Referring to the data presented in Tables 1 and 2, the appearance of written tagline functions as a *legisign* because its meaning is governed by the conventions of the English language. Accordingly, it is classified as a *symbol*. Within the written text, the proper name Sydney Sweeney directly refers to the model depicted in the background, establishing an *indexical* relationship between the written language and the visual image. At the same time, the “jeans” *symbolically* identifies the advertised product through linguistic convention. Considered as a whole, however, the tagline asserts a single factual proposition and resolves the homophonic ambiguity constructed throughout the preceding segments by directing interpretation toward “jeans” rather than “genes.” By resolving the ambiguity established throughout the previous segments, the written tagline functions as a *dicent-symbolic-legisign*.

Similarly, the verbal element presents the spoken tagline, “Sydney Sweeney has great jeans.” When analyzed independently from the visual element, the spoken tagline functions as a *legisign* because it derives its meaning from the conventions of the English language and is therefore classified as a *symbol*. As a complete proposition that the advertisement refers to a pair of denim jeans. Consequently, the spoken tagline is categorized as a *dicent-symbolic-legisign*.

Co-Occurrence and Dual Interpretations

Following the analysis of the four segments, the findings indicate that the key elements producing co-occurrence appear most prominently in Segment 1 and Segment 3, where verbal and visual signs interact to generate multiple simultaneous sign-processes. In these segments, the verbal elements are mostly classified as *legisign-symbol*, while accompanying visual elements are mostly classified as *sinsign-icon*, such as the texture of denim fabric, Sydney Sweeney’s blonde hair, and her blue eyes. Rather than functioning independently, these verbal and visual elements operate together to produce parallel interpretive pathways, establishing the basis of co-occurrence in the advertisement. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate these two key configurations in detail.

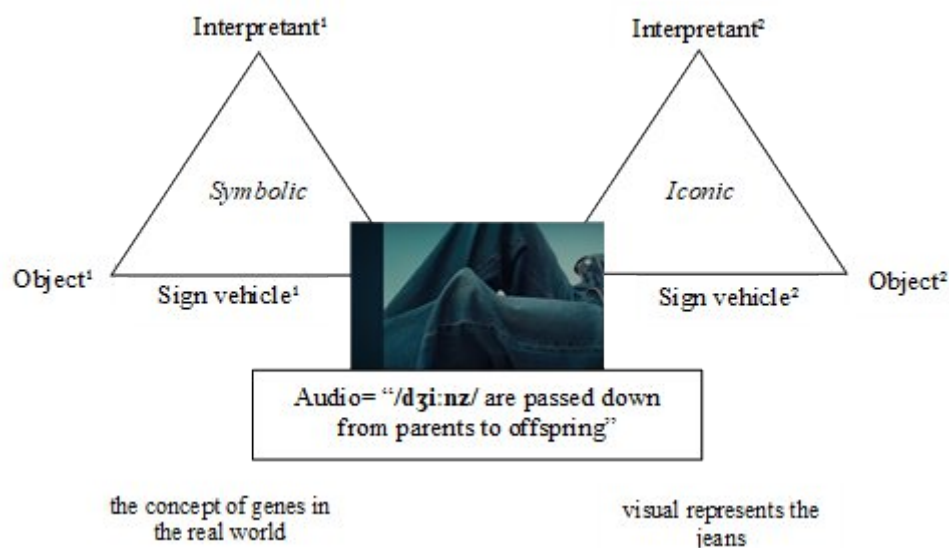


Fig 5. Two sign-processes in segment 1

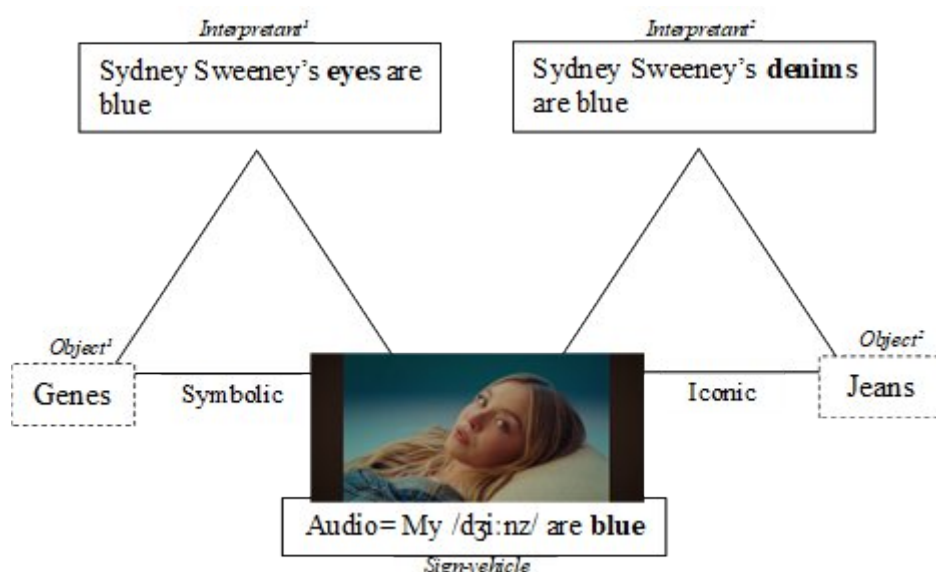


Fig 6. Single representamen generating dual interpretants in segment 3

As shown in Figure 5, the advertisement opener operates through two distinct yet co-occurring sign vehicles. The first sign vehicle is the audio pronunciation /dʒi:nz/, which activates the *symbolic* sign process by linking that sound to the biological concept of “genes” through established linguistic conventions. The second sign vehicle is the visual representation of denim on screen, which activates the *iconic* sign process by presenting the jeans product through direct visual resemblance. It should be noted that when examined separately as a verbal element, /dʒi:nz/ would in fact also function *symbolically* in relation to the commercial pathway, since the word “jeans” is equally a linguistic convention within the fashion system. Meanwhile, the visual representation of denim remains *iconic* because its relationship with the object is based on visual similarity to the actual product. Therefore, the co-occurrence of these two sign vehicles does not change the verbal sign from *symbolic* into *iconic*. Instead, the visual element provides a contextual direction that guides the interpretation of the *symbolic* sign /dʒi:nz/ toward the commercial meaning of “jeans,” while the *iconic* relation is still maintained by the visual denim. In this case, what changes is not the sign process of the verbal element, but the interpretant produced by the interaction between the two sign vehicles. The ambiguous interpretation gradually becomes a more specific commercial reading, while the symbolic and iconic characteristics of each sign vehicle remain distinct.

The biological interpretation is further reinforced in the next segment, where the narration explains that genes often determine inherited traits such as hair color, personality, and eye color. At this point, the phrase “hair color” establishes an *indexical* connection with Sydney Sweeney’s blonde hair, which is visually present in the same segment. This indexical relationship reinforces the biological pathway by linking the abstract concept of genetic inheritance to a concrete visual reference, namely, Sydney Sweeney’s physical appearance. As a result, the ad gradually constructs two parallel interpretive pathways: a biological pathway associated with genetic inheritance and a commercial pathway associated with the denim product.

As illustrated in Figure 6, the proposition “My /dʒi:nz/ are blue” functions differently from the opening segment. Instead of involving two separate sign-vehicles as in Figure 5, this statement functions as a sign-vehicle that simultaneously produces two different objects and two different interpretants. This structure resembles what Bateman (2018) describes in the postage stamp example. In the commercial pathway, the proposition is interpreted in relation to the visually presented blue denim, producing the interpretant that Sydney Sweeney’s jeans are blue. In the biological pathway, the proposition is interpreted differently. Although Sydney Sweeney’s blue eyes are visually present in the segment, the utterance never explicitly specifies that the attribute blue refers to her eyes. Instead, viewers infer this interpretation by connecting the earlier discussion of genes with the biological traits displayed visually. Thus, the biological interpretation relies primarily on *symbolic* inference, whereas the commercial interpretation is supported by the *iconic* relationship between the spoken proposition and the visible denim.

The interaction between these sign processes is most evident in the closing tagline “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans,” which is presented visually as written text and auditorily as a voiceover. Throughout the preceding segments, viewers are repeatedly exposed to references to genes, inherited traits, hair color, eye color, and denim products, allowing both biological and commercial interpretations to develop in parallel. However, the written form of “jeans” explicitly resolves the homophonic ambiguity of /dʒi:nz/ and directs toward the commercial meaning. In this case, the written text serves as confirmation of the commercial pathway, reinforcing the advertisement’s promotional purpose. However, the biological pathway does not disappear entirely, as it has been constructed through the preceding sequence of verbal and visual elements. Thus, viewers may still retain an association between Sydney Sweeney’s physical appearance and the discourse on genetic inheritance, even though the advertisement ultimately directs the interpretation toward the promoted jeans product.

This finding directly addresses the phenomenon discussed in the introduction, namely the public controversy over the two different interpretations of the advertisement. From the perspective of Peirce’s interpretant typology, the semiotic structure identified in this study represents the advertisement’s immediate interpretant, that is, the range of meanings made available by the co-occurrence of different sign processes. In this advertisement, these meanings include both the biological interpretation, supported by the *symbolic* (phonological) link between /dʒi:nz/ and the word “genes” together with visual traits such as blonde hair and blue eyes, and the commercial interpretation, supported by the *iconic* sign process of the visual denim alongside the phonological link to the word “jeans”. Because both sign processes are available within the same semiotic structure, the advertisement naturally allows two different interpretations to emerge. The biological interpretation reported in various news articles and the commercial interpretation later confirmed by the brand can therefore be understood as divergent dynamic interpretants. Rather than resulting from audience misunderstanding or misreading, these interpretations represent the actual effects produced by the same immediate interpretant in different interpreters.

The written and spoken tagline, “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans,” functions as another sign process that reinforces the commercial interpretation by explicitly directing the pronunciation /dʒi:nz/ toward “jeans”. However, this textual clarification does not remove the biological interpretation that has already been activated in the earlier segments. The continued appearance of the biological interpretation in public discussions demonstrates that both dynamic interpretants remain available, even though the final tagline gives greater prominence to the commercial interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the dual interpretations in the advertisement “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans” are produced through the co-occurrence of different sign processes operating simultaneously within the same audiovisual sequence. Rather than resulting from audience misunderstanding or from a blending of different sign categories, the commercial and biological interpretations emerge from two categorically distinct sign processes that develop in parallel throughout the advertisement. The homophonic sound /dʒi:nz/ serves as the key element, functioning as a shared qualisign in which the phonetic qualisign /dʒi:nz/ is realized as a spoken sinsign capable of instantiating two symbolic legisigns, “genes” and “jeans”. Each of these sign processes develops its own interpretive pathway through the verbal and visual elements presented across the four segments of the advertisement.

These findings explain the public controversy discussed in the introduction. In Peircean terms, the commercial interpretation confirmed by the brand and the biological interpretation reported in various news outlets represent two different dynamic interpretants. Rather than resulting from audience misunderstanding or misreading, these interpretations are the actual effects produced by the co-occurrence of distinct sign processes operating within the same advertisement. This study contributes to Peircean semiotics by demonstrating that Peirce's trichotomies, combined with Bateman's concept of co-occurring sign processes, can explain how a single advertisement generates multiple meanings without any category of sign being mixed or merged. By showing that categorically distinct sign-processes can operate simultaneously on shared material to produce divergent dynamic interpretants.

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