



DUAL MESSAGE ANALYSIS ON CIGARETTE ADVERTISING IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF MESSAGE DESIGN AND COGNITIVE LOAD

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received 17-02-2026 Revised 24-02-2026 Accepted 13-02-2026 Published 28-03-2026 How to cite: Fahrudin, M. F. N., Setyosari, P., & Kurniawan, C. (2026). Dual Message Analysis on Cigarette Advertising in the Perspective of Message Design and Cognitive Load. <i>Journal of Facilitating Learning and Improving Performance</i>, 1(1), 160–165. © The Author(s)  This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License	This study analyzes dual messages in cigarette advertisement posters using the perspective of message design and cognitive load. The study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis methods on cigarette advertisement posters. The researcher analyzes the posters based on assessment components and message design principles, including pedagogy, technology, logistics, text layout, graphics and color, multimedia components, and maintenance. The results show that the posters use symbolic visuals, contrasting colors, and artistic typography to attract audience attention. The posters create an image of freedom and self-expression through slogans and visual illustrations. However, the posters display dual messages between promotional messages and health warnings. This condition creates conflict in visual communication and increases audience cognitive load. The posters emphasize promotional messages more than health messages, reducing the educational function of the media. The findings show that effective message design requires not only strong visuals but also clear and consistent communication. Keywords: <i>Message Design; Dual Message; Cigarette Advertising; Visual Media; Cognitive Load.</i>

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the landscape of visual communication, positioning digital visual media as one of the most influential instruments in contemporary promotional practice. Companies increasingly rely on posters, videos, and digital illustrations not only to market their products, but also to construct brand identity and shape audience perception. As Mayer (2021) argues, effective visual media facilitates audience comprehension through the strategic integration of text and images, enabling information to be processed in a simpler and more targeted manner. Complementing this view, Lester (2018) emphasizes that visual communication extends beyond mere aesthetic function, serving as a primary vehicle for conveying meaning, identity, and emotional experience. In this context, message design, which encompasses the deliberate organization of color, typography, layout, illustration, and information structure, becomes a critical determinant of communicative effectiveness (Pettersson & Avgerinou, 2016).

Advertising posters, as one of the most widely used forms of visual media, rely heavily on message design principles such as attention, clarity, visual hierarchy, contrast, and emotional appeal to engage audiences within a compressed timeframe (Pettersson & Avgerinou, 2016). Kress & van Leeuwen (2020) further argue that visual elements carry symbolic meaning, constructing particular identities and emotional responses that go far beyond decorative function. Given that audiences typically engage with advertising posters only briefly, the capacity to deliver a clear, coherent, and compelling message within a single visual space is of paramount importance.

Cigarette advertising, however, presents a uniquely complex communicative challenge that distinguishes it from conventional promotional media. While cigarette companies employ motivational slogans, symbolic imagery, and carefully constructed visual narratives to project positive brand associations (such as freedom, creativity, and self-expression), government regulations simultaneously mandate the inclusion of health warnings that communicate the dangers of smoking within the exact same visual medium. The result is a poster that carries two fundamentally opposing messages: a promotional message designed to attract and persuade, and a health message designed to warn and deter. Witte & Allen (2015) note that threat-based messaging can produce significant emotional responses in audiences; however, in cigarette advertising, health warnings are frequently relegated to visually subordinate positions, thereby diminishing their communicative impact relative to the dominant promotional content.

This condition of dual messaging carries significant implications for audience cognition. Sweller (2019) explains that cognitive load theory addresses the mental capacity required to process information, noting that excessive or conflicting information can substantially increase cognitive burden while reducing comprehension. In the case of cigarette advertising posters, audiences are required to simultaneously process two contradictory messages, each operating through different emotional registers and communicative intentions. As Paivio (2014) observes, audiences process visual and verbal information concurrently. Therefore, when a visual medium presents conflicting informational streams, the cognitive effort required to reconcile and prioritize those messages may impede effective understanding. This phenomenon raises

important questions regarding the effectiveness of visual communication in contexts where regulatory and commercial imperatives coexist within a single design space.

Despite growing scholarly interest in visual communication and message design, research specifically addressing the dual-message structure of cigarette advertising posters remains limited. Prior studies, including Alfiriani et al. (2022), Ananta et al. (2024), and Vega & Eppendi (2021), have examined the influence of visual design on audience engagement, attention, and brand perception primarily in the context of educational or general promotional media, but they have not systematically addressed the communicative tensions inherent in cigarette advertising. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the dual messages present in cigarette advertising posters through the integrated perspectives of message design and cognitive load theory. Specifically, the study examines how visual elements, color, typography, and layout interact to either facilitate or impede effective visual communication in the presence of conflicting promotional and health messages.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis method. The study used this approach to understand the visual structure and meaning of the messages on cigarette advertising posters. The study used one cigarette advertisement poster as the research object. The study selected the poster because it represents the characteristics of dual message in cigarette advertising.

The study collected data through visual documentation of cigarette advertising posters. The study then analyzed the poster using message design assessment components which included pedagogy, technology, logistics, text layout, graphics and color, multimedia components, and maintenance.

The study also uses several message design principles such as attention, clarity, hierarchy, contrast, consistency, simplicity, readability, emotional appeal, and visual dominance. The study conducted data analysis through three stages. The first stage is to identify the visual and verbal elements on the poster. The second stage is to interpret the meaning of the message based on the principles of message design. The third stage is to evaluate the effect of dual messages on the cognitive load of the audience.

RESULTS

Analyzed Cigarette Advertising Poster

This study used one cigarette advertising poster as the object of analysis. The poster displays promotional slogans and health messages in one visual medium.



Figure 1. Cigarette Advertising Poster

The poster uses the slogan “*Biar Karya yang Bicara*” in a large size with striking colors. The poster also uses desert illustrations to build a sense of freedom and self-expression. In addition, the poster displays health messages in the form of “*Peringatan: Merokok Membunuhmu*” at the bottom of the media.

Assessment Results

The results of the analysis of message design principles can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of Message Design Principles on Cigarette Advertising Poster

Message Design Principles	Findings on the Poster	Impact on Audience	Recommended Improvement
Attention	The poster uses red and large slogans to attract attention	Audiences pay attention to the poster more quickly.	Posters can add white space to make the visual focus clearer
Clarity	The poster displays a dual message between the promotion and the health message	Audiences have a hard time determining the focus of the main message	Health messages need to be made more dominant
Visual Hierarchy	Logos and slogans look more dominant than health messages	Audience is more focused on product promotion	Visual hierarchy needs to be balanced
Contrast	Posters use contrasting colors to reinforce brand identity	Audience more easily recognises the product	Contrast in health messages needs to be strengthened
Consistency	Promotional visuals and health visuals have different atmospheres	The audience accepts emotional conflict	Posters need to improve visual consistency
Simplicity	Posters use simple visual elements	Audiences understand the media faster	Message structure needs to be made more focused
Emotional Appeal	Posters create an impression of freedom and self-expression	Audiences have an emotional attachment to the brand	Emotional approaches need to be balanced with health messages
Cognitive Load	The audience processes two different messages at the same time	Increased audience's cognitive load	Message conflicts need to be reduced

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that cigarette advertising posters use powerful visuals to grab the audience's attention. The poster uses large slogans, contrasting colors, and symbolic illustrations to build an image of freedom and self-expression. This finding shows that the poster strongly applies the principles of attention and emotional appeal. However, the poster displays a dual message between a promotional message and a health message. Promotional messages build a positive image of cigarette products, while health messages display threats about the dangers of smoking. This conflict makes visual communication less consistent.

The poster also puts slogans and logos in a more dominant position than health messages. This condition makes the audience more focused on brand identity rather than health risks conveyed in the media. The results of this study are in accordance with the theory of Cognitive Load which explains that complex information can increase the mental load of the audience. The audience has to process two different messages at the same time, making the interpretation process more complex. In addition, posters emphasize an emotional approach rather than an informative approach. Posters use symbolic illustrations and contrasting colors to build the audience's emotional experience. Modern advertising media often prioritizes emotional engagement to strengthen audience attachment to brands.

This research shows that the effectiveness of message design depends not only on visual strength, but also on clarity and consistency of communication. Conflicting messages may reduce audience focus on the main purpose of the communication.

Practically, the results of this research can be considered in the development of visual media that is more balanced between persuasion and educational aspects. In the context of digital visual communication, the balance between visual appeal and message clarity is an important factor so that the media not only attracts attention, but is also able to convey information effectively.

CONCLUSION

Cigarette advertising posters use symbolic visuals, contrasting colors, and artistic typography to grab the audience's attention. Posters also build an image of freedom and self-expression through slogans and visual illustrations.

However, the poster displays a dual message between a promotional message and a health message. As a result, the poster creates communication conflict and increases audience cognitive load. Posters also highlight promotional messages more than health messages so that the media education function is less optimal. This research shows that visual media needs to pay attention to the balance between visual appeal and message clarity so that communication can be received by the audience more effectively.

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