

Meaning of Icons in Apple's iOS: A Semiotic Study

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Abstrak

Jaman sekarang, komunikasi lebih sering dilakukan melalui smartphone. Hampir semua orang mempunyai smartphone, akan tetapi tidak semua orang mengerti bagaimana cara menggunakannya, dan mereka sering mengalami kesulitan karena mereka tidak mengerti gambar yang ada di ikon pada smartphone mereka. Tulisan ini akan menganalisa signifier, signified, tipe makna dari tiap ikon di sistem operasi iOS milik Apple.

Sumber data penelitian ini diambil dari website pengembang apple. Pengambilan data dilakukan dengan teknik mencari dan dilanjutkan dengan mengunduh gambar ikon. Data yang sudah dikumpulkan dianalisa menggunakan teori semiotic milik Saussure untuk mencari signifier dan signifiednya. Kemudian data yang sudah dianalisa tersebut disajikan dalam bentuk tabel. Makna dari tiap ikon kemudian dianalisa menggunakan teori makna dari Leech.

Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa tiap ikon terdiri dari signifier dan signified. Beberapa ikon memiliki desain yang lebih sederhana dibandingkan dengan beberapa ikon lain yang lebih rumit. Ikon yang lebih sederhana memiliki keunggulan yaitu lebih mudah dikenali daripada ikon yang lebih rumit. Makna pada tiap ikon di system operasi iOS disiratkan secara konseptual, terpancut, kolokatif, and tematik. Tiga tipe makna lainnya yaitu makna konotatif, social dan afektif tidak ditemukan karena makna tersebut dipengaruhi oleh faktor yang tidak dapat ditemukan dalam ikon seperti budaya, konteks sosial, dan perasaan.

Kata Kunci: iOS, ikon, system operasi, semiotika, tipe makna.

1. Background

Communication is an activity that involves speaking, listening, touching, and performing other things with another person. By communicating, information can be collected, exchanged, or delivered from one another. In this modern era, communication is mostly done digitally through smartphone. The invention of smartphones has made communication easier and effortless.

Smartphones are like computers, they need an operating system in order to work. Operating system is software that supports the computer's basic function; simply it is the brain of the computer. Examples of operating systems include Windows, iOS,

Android, Blackberry OS, Tizen, Symbian, etc. In order to communicate with their users, operating system generates the user's interface (UI). The goal of the user's interface is to relate phone functions and operations to the elements of interaction (sounds and visual elements). The user's interfaces on smartphone uses icon to represent a function for performing tasks. Visual aspects such as graphics and icons are essential elements of user-device interaction, thus they are used extensively in interface design on the assumption that visual icons are capable of eliminating language barriers and presenting meaning in condensed form.

Icons are language-independent; they do not rely on letters or words to convey their meaning. Their design is also limited by their visual parameter, thus it requires a certain skill to create an icon. The previous iteration of iOS uses skeuomorphic design, a design of language that reflects real property of the real object characterized by the use of heavy textures, and drop shadows to indicate an icon. In the newest version of iOS, it ditches skeuomorphic design in favor of minimalist design, which means no textures or shadows, only a flat symbol. The icon design in iOS is very minimal; it challenges the designer's ability to put as much information as possible in such limited visual parameter while also providing a meaning that is easily recognizable for people of all ages and background.

It is interesting to know what inspires the software engineer and what makes them decide to use that certain symbol as an icon and the meaning behind the icons themselves.

2. Problems of the Study

Based on the explanation given above, the problems formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the signifier and signified of each icon in Apple's iOS?
- 2) How are the meanings of each icon in Apple's iOS implied?

3. Aims of the Study

In accordance with the problems above, the aims of this study are:

- 1) To find out the signifier and signified of each icon Apple's iOS.
- 2) To analyze the type of meaning of each icon in Apple's iOS.

4. Research Method

In doing researches, there should be a fixed guideline on how the research is conducted. Research method is required in order to determine the appropriate procedures of the study which mainly consists of three aspects, namely (1) Data Source, (2) Method and Technique of Collecting Data and (3) Method and Technique of Analyzing Data.

4.1 Data Source

Data source is a source where the data is obtained. The data source used for this study was obtained from iOS, one of the most popular operating systems in the world. iOS is chosen because it is the operating system that popularizes touch interface. It is widely used worldwide and by everyone. Compared to other operating system, it is built to be operated using touchscreen instead of mouse, keyboards, or button.

4.2 Method and Technique of Collecting Data

Method and technique of collecting data are important. Data collection concerns with the steps for obtaining data and classifying all data in qualitative form. In attempting to find the data, documentation method was applied in this study. Documentation method is a method of collecting data by looking for data in the form of script, newspaper, magazine, book, etc. The data for the current study were collected through some steps. The first step was finding out the number of app in iOS. The next step was looking for the image of icon for each app in iOS by browsing apple's developer website.

The sampling of the data was conducted using the searching technique continued by downloading the data. The data in the form of icons were taken from Apple's Developer Website by downloading. The method and technique of collecting data were chosen because they are suitable with the type of data source.

4.3 Method and Technique of Analyzing Data

The collected data were analyzed based on the qualitative method. The qualitative method is a multi method based predominantly on non-numerical data. It involves an interpretive, naturalist approach to its subject matter. Beside the qualitative method, this study also uses the simple quantitative method. The collected data were analyzed using Saussure's theory of semiotics in order to find the signifier and signified. The data is furthermore presented in the form of table.

The meaning of each icon were analyzed using Leech's theory of meaning. The meaning of each icon is categorized according to the type of meaning, namely conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning. The analyzed data were descriptively presented in order to give a clear and complete explanation.



5. Result and Discussion


The icons in Apple' iOS consist of signifier and signified. The meaning of the icons are implied conceptually, reflectedly, collocatively, and thematically..

5.1 Signifier and Signified of Icons in Apple's iOS

According to Saussure (1983:67), a sign consists of a signifier and a signified. Signifier is a form taken by the sign to represent what is being expressed. Signified is an abstract concept of what the signifier represents. The sign is the result of the association between the signifier and the signified.

The following icons are found in Apple's iOS operating system. Each icon is analyzed into its signifier and signified. The result is as follows:

No	Icon	Signifier	Signified
1		The icon is a white square with rounded corners. A musical note in three colors (dark blue, light blue, magenta) is at the center.	The icon signifies a music player where iOS users can listen to downloaded music, or stream it from Apple Music.
2		The icon is a magenta square with rounded corners. Inside the icon, there is an image resembling a newspaper.	The icon signifies a program that acts as a news-feed where iOS users can read news from around the world.

3		<p>The icon is a rounded square divided into two parts. The top part is yellow and the bottom part is white with a dotted line and three horizontal lines below it.</p>	<p>The icon signifies a program that enables iOS users to take notes.</p>
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5.2 Types of Meaning of Icons in Apple's iOS

The meaning of each icon is classified based on Leech's theory which breaks down the meaning into seven types. Four out of seven types of meaning are found in the icons:

5.2.1 Conceptual Meaning

Conceptual meaning is also called logical or cognitive meaning. It is the basic propositional meaning which corresponds to the primary dictionary definition and refers to the idea or concept it refers to. From 33 icons in iOS, 16 of them are classified into conceptual meaning because the meaning of these icons they have physical form of the program/concept that the icons represent.

Clock

The icon is designed to look like a wall clock. Although it looks like a wall clock, it has additional function that a standard wall clock does not have such as alarm, timer, and stopwatch. The program automatically changes time zone if users travel to a new region with different time zone. The icon can also act like an actual clock because the clock's hands move in real time according to the current time.



Figure 1 the clock icon resembles a wall clock.

5.2.2 Reflected Meaning

At the lexical level of language, reflected meaning arises when a word has more than one conceptual meaning or multiple conceptual meaning and we only respond to the one we are accustomed to the most. In such cases while responding to one sense of the word we partly respond to another sense of the word too. Twelve out of 33 icons in iOS are classified as reflected meaning because these icons need to be responded with another sense of the sign in the icon.

iCloud Drive

The cloud shape in the icon could be mistaken as weather app or other sky-related program, but actually it represents iCloud, Apple's cloud storage service. It also refers to cloud storage, a term used to describe a storage system that does not have physical form, because data are saved in remote servers (in iCloud, it is Apple's servers)



Figure 19 the cloud in iCloud Drive icon refers to cloud storage.

and can be accessed anytime and anywhere through internet connection.

5.2.3 Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning is the meaning which a word acquires when it is accompanied by certain word. Words only collocate or co-occur with certain word. Collocative meaning refers to association of a word because of its usual or habitual co-occurrence with certain type of words. From 33 icons in iOS, 3 of them are classified as having the collocative meaning because the meanings of these icons are obtained from their usual or habitual co-occurrence.

Calculator

The plus (+), minus (-), multiply (x), and equal (=) sign on the calculator icon are universal symbol, most people know them. They are also often related to

mathematics. The usage of these signs is meant to make the icon easily recognizable as a program that can perform mathematical operation



Figure 29 calculator icon and its mathematical signs

5.2.4 Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning refers to what is communicated by the way in which a speaker or a writer organizes the messages in terms of ordering focus and emphasis. Two out of 33 icons in iOS are classified into thematic meaning because their meanings are conveyed through how the signs are ordered and emphasized.

App Store

At the center of the icon is the letter “A”. The letter is formed by a pencil, a ruler, and a paintbrush; tools are used to create something which also represents creativity. The letter A in the icon stands for the first letter in the word “App”, putting emphasis on it. The combination of these signs assumes that the program is a digital store containing applications created through the creativity of the developers.



Figure 32 the A in App Store icon is formed by a pencil, a ruler, and a paintbrush.

6. Conclusion

There are some points concluded based on the analysis from the previous chapters. There are 33 icons in iOS, each of them consists of signifier and signified. The designs of some icons are simple while others are more complex. Simpler icons have the advantage of being easier to be recognized than more complex icons.

The meanings of icons in Apple's iOS are implied conceptually, reflectedly, collocatively, and thematically. Conceptual meaning is mostly found on icons that resemble the actual object such as calendar, clock, camera, wallet, phone, news, map, etc. Reflected meaning is found on the icon that resembles familiar object but they have different meaning such as the cloud in iCloud icon that refers to cloud storage, or compass in Safari icon that reflects brand identity. Collocative meaning is found on icons that have several symbols which usually appear together (co-occur) such as calculator and weather icon. More complex icons that consist of several arranged signs such as App Store icon and photos contain thematic meaning.

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