

# SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF *MEMES* IN 9GAG.COM

By

MADE NUNIK SAYANI

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

FACULTY OF LETTERS UDAYANA UNIVERSITY

## Abstrak

*www.9gag.com merupakan salah satu situs komedi internasional yang mulai terkenal sejak pembuatannya di tahun 2008. Orang – orang di seluruh dunia dapat mengakses situs ini secara bebas dan mengunggah gambar – gambar lucu ke situs ini. Para pengunggah gambar dan pembaca 9gag biasanya menggunakan sebuah tanda berupa gambar kartun dari bermacam – macam ekspresi wajah manusia yang disebut dengan “meme” yang memiliki fitur – fitur khusus sehingga masing – masing meme memiliki fungsi yang berbeda. Dalam penelitian ini, penanda dan pertanda dari dua buah meme, “Poker Face” meme dan “Okay” meme, dianalisis bersama dengan fungsi mereka ketika digunakan di dalam post atau cerita komik.*

*Kata kunci: meme, 9gag, fungsi*

## 1. Background of the Study

Starting from a need of entertainment from the internet, sites that contain jokes began to emerge. One of them that increasingly popular today is 9gag.com or more commonly referred to as 9gag. 9gag is an international comedy website set in Hong Kong but hosted in the United States. It was launched in 2008. Even if the jokes that were posted on 9gag.com came from various backgrounds, but all 9gagers, the 9gag lovers, use and understand *memes* (sing: *meme*), the typical comical sign that used in 9gag. The posts in 9gag.com are comical stories and funny pictures that usually come up with the *memes*. There are more than 25 *memes* in 9gag.com and some of the *memes* are popular even outside 9gag.com, like in social network Facebook and Twitter. These *memes* then become the ‘trademark’ of 9gag.com.

This study analyzed two typical *memes* that frequently used in the posts, “Poker Face” *meme* and “Okay” *meme*, These two *memes* are the most popular ones

and start to get their fame not only among the 9gagers, but also non-9gagers, and posted in some social networks like Facebook and Twitter. These two *memes* also have certain function and often appear exclusively to give comment about a picture.

## **2. Problems of the Study**

Based on the background above, two problems are discussed in this study. They are:

1. What are the signifiers and signified of each *memes* used in 9gag.com?
2. What is the function of each *memes* when they are used in the posts in 9gag.com?

## **3. Aims of Study**

The aims of this study are:

1. To find out the signifiers and signified of each *memes* used in 9gag.com
2. To find out the function of each *memes* when they are used in the posts in 9gag.com

## **4. Research Method**

### **4.1 Data Source**

The data source of this study was taken from [www.9gag.com](http://www.9gag.com). This study took two *memes* that are explained before in the background, “Poker Face” *meme* and “Okay” *meme*. This source is used because the *memes* are found only in 9gag.com. The reason why only these two *memes* are used because they are the most popular in 9gag.com and often shared via social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. These two *memes* also have certain function and often appear exclusively to give comment about a picture.

## 4.2 Method and Technique of Collecting Data

In collecting data, both library and online research were applied. First, library research was used to obtain information about semiotic theories, the concepts of signs, meaning, and context of situation theory. It is relevant to be used in analyzing meaning and function. Next, online research was applied to collect the data from [www.9gag.com](http://www.9gag.com). Data that were collected from 9gag are the picture of the *memes* and posts that used the two *memes*, “Poker Face” *meme* and “Okay” *meme*. The posts were then selected which ones are appropriate for the study.

## 4.3 Method and Technique of Analyzing Data

The data were analyzed based on the theories applied in this study. The theories that were used are the theory of semiotics from Saussure and the theory of semiotics and signs by Chandler.

First, the theory from Saussure about semiotics were used to analyze and find out the signifiers and signified of the two *memes*; “Poker Face” *meme* and “Okay” *meme*. In analyzing the signifiers and signified of the *memes*, the features of each *memes* were analyzed using semiotic theory from Saussure about signifier and signified. The signifiers of each *memes* were analyzed to get the signified. Next, the function of each *memes* in the post was analyzed using the theory from Chandler.

## 5. The Analysis of “Poker Face” *Meme* and “Okay” *Meme* of 9gag.com

### 5.1 “Poker Face” *Meme*

“Poker Face” *meme* is a *meme* in form of facial human being expression that is used quite often in 9gag posts. This is the appearance of “Poker Face” *meme*:



### *Meme 1 (Original form of Poker Face meme)*

One post which using the “Poker Face” *meme* were taken from [www.9gag.com](http://www.9gag.com). The theory of semiotics from Saussure were used to find out the signifiers and signified of each original form of the *memes* and theory of semiotic and sign by Chandler were used to analyze the function of each *memes* when they are used in the post.

The original forms of each *memes* were analyzed using the theory from Saussure by analyzing the signifiers (features of each *memes*) to get the signified which is leading to the meaning of the *memes*.

The *memes* in 9gag.com are the signs of various comical facial expressions of human being that particularly found in 9gag.com. According to Nummenmaa (1964) and Leonhard (1976) (cited in Nöth:1995), the variable semiotic potential of the face is usually studied under the heading facial expression. Eyebrows and forehead, eyes, nose, lips and jaw, cheeks, and skin are the regions by which facial signals can be transmitted.

From the signifiers or the features of the *memes* which is the cartoon facial expression of human being, the signified can be concluded.

- a. The eyes which are only illustrated by two dots without eyebrows or lines around the eyes indicating a very plain gaze, no specific emotion reflected from the eyes. The absence of eyebrows and lines that usually emphasizing the gaze of the eyes also indicating no specific emotion is reflected from the eyes.
- b. One straight horizontal line under the eyes as mouth and one shorter horizontal line under the mouth signifying a tightly closed mouth with no smile or frown, just tightly closed. This indicating someone who cannot say anything and just keep silent.

- c. The name of the *meme* is “Poker Face”. According to Oxford Dictionary, “Poker Face” is a noun phrase for a face with an expression that does not show what you are thinking or feeling.

From the signifiers and signified for each features of “Poker Face” *meme* above, it can be concluded that “Poker Face” *meme* indicates a facial expression of someone who is ‘flat’, showing no specific emotion and just keep silent because of something, maybe awkward or embarrassing situation, that caused him/her does not know how to react with that.

The function of this *meme* is showed up clearly when it is used in a post. Post 1 which using the Poker Face *meme* were taken from [www.9gag.com](http://www.9gag.com) and analyzed.

The function of the *meme* in this post were analyzed by first, classifying the signs in the post, which one is the symbol, icon, or index, and then how the signs act in the post. Lastly, the function of the *meme* can be concluded by seeing how the *meme* and the other sign act and what are they representing.

- a. Analysis of Post 1



Post 1

There are three symbols in this post. The first one is a sentence “The awkward moment when you’re at your friend’s house and your friend is getting yelled at, so you just stand there and pet the dog”. This verbal sign act as the symbol that used to represent what the writer wants to communicate about the situation in the post. The

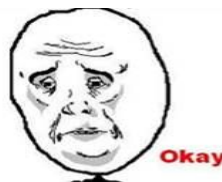
second one is a phrase “Good boy” that used to represent what the character in the post said when he pet the dog. The last one is the phrase “Poker Face” that used to represent the *meme* as the facial expression of the dog.

There are two icons in this post, both in cartoon form. The first one is the dog and the second one is the boy or the main “actor” of the post who pet the dog with nervous expression. These icons are representing what is happened in the post and illustrating the verbal signs or the symbols.

The awkward situation is the psychological setting in this post. From the symbols and the icons it can be conclude that the situation in the post is when the boy is at his friend’s house and his friend is getting yelled at. He does not know what to do and only stand and pet his friend’s dog. He is trapped in an awkward situation, and the “Poker Face” *meme* within the dog indicates that the dog also feel awkward because the boy suddenly pet him with nervous expression in the tension situation when its master is getting yelled at.

## 5.2 “Okay” *Meme*

“Okay” *meme* is a *meme* in a form of human facial expression that is used quite often in 9gag posts. This is the appearance of “Okay” *meme*:



*Meme 2 (Original Form of “Okay” Meme)*

The original forms of each *memes* were analyzed using the theory from Saussure by analyzing the signifiers (features of each *memes*) to get the signified which is leading to the meaning of the *memes*.

The *memes* in 9gag.com are the signs of various comical facial expressions of human being that particularly found in 9gag.com. According to Nummenmaa (1964) and Leonhard (1976) (cited in Nöth:1995), the variable semiotic potential of the face is usually studied under the heading facial expression. Eyebrows and forehead, eyes, nose, lips and jaw, cheeks, and skin are the regions by which facial signals can be transmitted.

From the signifiers or the features of the *memes* which is the cartoon facial expression of human being, the signified can be concluded.

- a. Looking-down eyes with downed eyebrows showing a sad or tired feeling.
- b. Frowning lips with some lines around it indicating a sad expression. Lines that appear around the lips and forehead indicating a tired, sad, and old person.
- c. The name of the *meme* is “Okay”. “Okay” is same with “OK” in English spoken word. According to Oxford Dictionary, “Okay” is an exclamation word means ‘yes’ or ‘all right’ and can be used to stop people arguing with you or criticizing you. This name indicates that the expression is for a person who is sad because he/she was forced to accept something in order to stop the critic or argument from someone.

From the signifiers and signified for each features of “Okay” *meme* above, it can be concluded that “Okay” *meme* indicates a facial expression of someone who is sad, tired, and forced to accept something that he/she does not like.

The function of this *meme* is showed up clearly when it is used in a post. Post 2 which using the Poker Face *meme* were taken from [www.9gag.com](http://www.9gag.com) and analyzed.

The function of the *meme* in this post were analyzed by first, classifying the signs in the post, which one is the symbol, icon, or index, and then how the signs act

in the post. Lastly, the function of the *meme* can be concluded by seeing how the *meme* and the other sign act and what are they representing.

b. Analysis of Post 2



Post 2

Symbols in this post tell what is happening in the post. In the first section there are three symbols or sentences that have different function. The first one is “Taking a look at myself in the mirror” that explains the activity done by the character. The second one is “I’m not that ugly!”. This symbol is said by the character, indicates the character’s thought about himself that he is not ugly. The third one is “the mirror”, explains the picture above it.

In the second section, there are two symbols. First is a sentence that is said by the character, “Gonna take a snapshot of how awesome I look!”. This explains what the character is going to do, taking a picture of himself that he thought as “awesome”. The second symbol is the word “click” that represents the sound of the camera when he took his picture. In the third section there is only one symbol in a form of word, “Result:” that indicates the result of the picture-taking.



In the last section, there are two sentences that act as symbols. The first one is “Guess I’m pretty ugly after all” that represents what the character said and thought after he seen the result of the picture-taking. The second one is the word “delete” that indicates the character deleted the picture because he found out he is ugly.

The icon in this post is the cartoon picture of the character including the picture of mirror, phone, his ugly face in the photo, and all of his face expressions including the “Okay” *meme*. All of these icons are illustrating the verbal signs, like the ugly face in the third section illustrating the result of picture-taking, and the “Okay” *meme* in the last section illustrating that after he seen the picture he realized that he is ugly.

From the symbols and the icons the abstract concept of what the signifier mean can be concluded. It can be seen that the character was looking at his reflection in the mirror and thinking that he is awesome and not so ugly. Then, he decided to take a picture of himself. But when he saw the result, he realized that he is not awesome like what he thought. He is ugly, and the “Okay” *meme* indicates that he just accepted it because it is the reality and he had seen the evidence, the picture of himself.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has discussed the two *memes* of [www.9gag.com](http://www.9gag.com), “Poker Face” *meme* and “Okay” *meme*. From the features or the signifiers of each *memes*, the signified or the abstract concept from each of them can be known, and it leads to the meaning of each *memes*. The *memes* has different signifiers that lead to different signified, and different function when they are used in the posts. “Poker Face” *meme* indicating a facial expression of someone who is ‘flat’, showing no specific emotion and just keep silent because of something that caused him/her does not know how to react with that thing or situation. “Okay” *meme* indicates a facial expression of someone who is sad, tired, and forced to accept something.

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