

## **Representation of Beautiful Women in Skin-Whitening Cosmetics TV Commercials**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Realizing the true intention of the message the media convey becomes important since sometimes the message is hidden behind the text. Today advertisement of skin-whitening cosmetics has changed the way people consider about beautiful women. Therefore, this research is aimed at finding how beautiful women are represented in skin-whitening TV commercials. The study uses descriptive analysis which is qualitative in nature. Employing visual grammar framework as proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and the concept of second order of signification by Barthes (1957), the study analyzes pictures and narrations/dialogues contained in three skin-whitening cosmetics TV commercials. The study found that beautiful women represented as confident, powerful, have good personalities, modern, women's best friend and object of attraction.

**Keyword:** *advertising, construction, representation, skin-whitening cosmetics, TV commercial*

## INTRODUCTION

Advertisement nowadays appears to be a powerful medium in conveying messages. Besides promoting products, advertisement also offers some ideologies. For instance, skin-whitening cosmetics TV commercials today are similar to each other in portraying the image of beautiful women. Employing white, slim, tall and straight long hair women as the endorsement may be understood as offering a belief, thus ideology that beautiful women are women with such characteristics. People are forced to accept the idea that slender figure, long straight hair and white skin are the accepted representation of beautiful women. Thus, the representation of beautiful women in skin-whitening cosmetics is an interesting phenomenon to analyze. This is because Indonesia is a tropical country, therefore Indonesian women usually have brownish skin in nature, and the women seen in the TV commercials give Indonesian women an idea that they can also become as white as the model's skin.

Departing from that point, this research is aimed to analyze three skin-whitening cosmetics TV commercials. Those are *Olay Natural White All In One Agnes Monica Version*, *Citra Spotless White UV Guru TK Version*, and *Pond's White Beauty New*. This research attempts to reveal the representation of beautiful women in the TV commercials and how the representation is constructed.

This research is expected to enrich the attempt of making audience to be able to see beyond what is shown. Audience needs to be educated so they are not taking what the media said for granted. Furthermore, this research is employing visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) as the theoretical framework. It is different from other studies (for example Prabasmoro's (2003) study) on representation of women in advertisements where the analysis weren't based on the visual grammar theory.

Barthes indicated that in every denotation signs, there were connotation meanings. Those connotation meanings were actually myths established in the society. Barthes argued that although signs naturally have already had their connotative meanings, it still needs an active reader to assign the meaning to the signs. The meaning then is determined by the knowledge and culture the reader acknowledge. According to Barthes (1957), meaning in denotation stage is the first order, while on top of that is the second order of signification. The second order explains about the connotation meaning. Barthes' second order of signification is employed as the basis to conduct the research.

Moreover, visual signs are analyzed using the visual grammar theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Image needs rules to make it meaningful to others. Kress and van Leeuwen formulated the rules employed by visual objects to make others understand the meaning of the image. The theory is called visual grammar (2006). All

forms of text have to serve several representational and communicational requirements. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) adopted Michael Halliday's (1970) notion of metafunctions in visual language: ideational (semiotic mode that has to be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans), interpersonal (semiotic mode that has to be able to project the relations between the producer of a sign and the receiver of that same sign) and textual metafunction (semiotic mode that has to be able to form texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally with each other and externally with the context in and for which they were produced).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employs descriptive qualitative method to answer the research questions. This research describes critically the phenomenon in the form of how beautiful women are represented. There are two different types of data, text (verbal signs) and image (visual signs) data. Semiotics is used to analyze the

collected data. The analysis will be done using Roland Barthes' theory orders of signification (1957).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the data analysis, the research finds that beautiful women in skin-whitening cosmetics are represented as confident, powerful, have good personalities, modern, women's best friend and object of attraction. Furthermore, these representations are constructed through the use of warm color such as light blue, light yellow and purple, the models' hands and eye lines, the centre-margin picture composition, the use of frontal, oblique, and low angle, the offer and demand from the represented participants' gaze and the use of close and medium shot.

Since its establishment, advertisement has been made to manipulate the awareness, taste and consumers' behavior toward the products advertised. People would normally believe in something they hear and see. For centuries, people desire and dreams have been driven by what they hear and see. And that is what the ad makers exploit in

order to sell their products. The use of advertisement has changed to not merely advertising the product, but also expressing the creativity of its ad makers. Words, audio, color, people, goods, landscapes, visual effects, many things in this digital world can be explored to create an advertisement. Brand positioning is also important in advertising the product. Moreover, the aesthetics values of the advertisement and brand positioning can establish one idealized image. In relation to this research, the idealized image of beautiful women is women with white skin. Women with white skin are illustrated as having many good qualities and become the object of attraction. These investigated TV commercials make white skin and beauty seems easy to attain. Everybody can be white and beautiful. In fact, not all women can be white. Especially in Indonesia where women in this tropical country naturally have brown skin due to the environment where they live.

## CONCLUSION

Since the media exposure on people can give big influence to what people think and do, the view of this idealized beauty should considerably be changed. The advertisers should be in neutral position. But this idealized image of beautiful woman is not constructed in one night. Therefore, people have to be more selective of what they watch, read and listen. Media literacy is important to filter the wave of information in this global era. The research only answers the representation of beautiful women in skin-whitening cosmetics TV commercials in terms of picture composition and second order of signification. Future research in this topic should elaborate more about the modality of the picture—the degree of truth and falsehood of the picture. Since it is relatively new, picture analysis stores great potential and ideas. That is why visual grammar should be introduced to students in order to improve their analytical skills. In the meantime, the research about media exposure in

people is extensive and would be interesting to analyze.

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