

## A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISEMENTS

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**Abstract**—This study aimed to find out and to describe the meaning of the verbal and visual signs in public service advertisements. The data were taken from the internet, which have included the verbal and visual signs. There were two theories applied in this study. The theory of Semiotics proposed by (Saussure, 1983) and the theory of meaning by (Leech, 1981). The process of collecting data was observation method. Through the analysis it was found that verbal and visual signs have important rules to make attractive and good advertisement. In term of verbal sign, these advertisements consist of the text which has an excellent word choice to attract the reader's interests. Meanwhile, from the visual sign, these advertisements represent unique picture which is to support verbal sign in order to make it easier for reader to understand the context of an advertisement. Overall, the use of verbal and visual sign in the advertisement is really important to share the message of the advertisement and also to attract the readers' attention.

**Keywords**— Advertisements; Verbal sign, Visual Sign

### 1. Introduction

Languages consist of thousands of signs. In interpreting signs, it needs knowledge about how the way of sign could be interpreted as well as what it's purpose. Humans use language to get an information, the information is delivered through verbal and visual sign. Both are used because they can work together in delivering certain and implicit meaning in the study of semiotics. Semiotics is a study of signs and symbols and their use of interpretation. (Saussure, 1983) defines semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their meaning and the use. Both between the signifier and the signified in oral or written form of the sign and the meaning it embodies. Basically, semiotics learns how human interpret things around them. Semiotics learns about the function of the image that aims to understand the meaning that store in an image. According to (Saussure, 1857-1913), as well-known as the father of modern linguistics, look forward to a science that studies the life of sign within societies, he called it Semiology from the Greek semion "sign". Saussure define as a sign as the composition of signifier and signified. Signifier is the form which the sign takes. Signified is the concept it represents both in verbal and non-verbal. Meaning has very important role in advertisement. It is one of the strategies of the advertiser to deliver the messages to the readers.

Pierce stated in (Chandler 2001:16) that sign more specifically the form of words, images, sounds, odors, flavors, acts or objects. A verbal sign is a text which may in form of word, phrase, and sentence, that represents what people think, feel or represents their emotions. In advertisement, the verbal sign is the word such as slogan and all of the word that can see in the advertisement. And visual sign is picture that can see from our sense. Non-verbal sign is the used of body language to communicate such as face expression, eye contact, etc. Now adays, non-verbal sign can be captured and print to make a picture. In this globalization era, there are many forms of media used by people to communicate, we can find the advertisement in the television, radio, newspaper, magazines, brochure or social media. There are many kinds of advertisements, which in general have the same purpose such as cosmetic, food, drink, sport, movie poster, etc.

The public service advertisement is serving to educate the community about important topics like environmental protection, education, physical and mental health, substance abuse, crime, driving safety and other issues that people in the neighbourhood might face. Public service advertisement is designed to inform

the public on issues that are frequently considered to be in the general best interests of the community at large. Public service advertisements involve the collective interest of a community and are concerned to spread the awareness for a purpose that is broadcasted without any charge by the government for the promotion of some state programs or other social agendas. Usually, advertisement can influence the mindset of society because the power of media is very large and cannot be stopped, so it can be said that advertising can form a lifestyle of the people. The advertiser makes a good picture, a good sentence, also artist as a model to their advertisement to persuade people to take public attention.

Regarding to the explanation above, the problems of this study were formulated as follows: (1) What verbal and visual signs are used in public service advertisements? and (2) What meanings of the verbal and visual signs are used in public service advertisements? This study is very interesting since it focusses to find out the verbal and visual signs communication through symbols and to analyse the meaning in the advertisements. The public service advertisement presents many attractive and unique combination between word choices, colours and pictures than other advertisements that make public aware of an important issue and lead them to take a specific action.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature review about this study was taken from three previous researchers who have done the analysis of verbal and visual signs. The first thesis was written by (Risaldi, 2017) entitled “A Semiotic Analysis of Awarta Nusa Dua Luxury Villas and Spa Advertisement Found in Now! Bali Magazine!”. From the analysis, Risaldi found that the verbal and visual signs had important rules to make an attractive and good advertisement. In term of verbal signs, she found that the advertisements consist of the text that has excellent way in choosing of words to attract the reader interest. From the visual sign, these advertisement represent enchanting pictures, which promoted the accommodation and other facilities.

The second thesis was written by (Asih, 2016) entitled “A Semiotic Analysis of the Advertisement of BUKALAPAK compared to TOKOPEDIA and ELEVENIA”. Her study focused on analysing the denotative meanings and connotative meanings, and also the message contained in Bukalapak that interest people. The method used in analysing the data was descriptive qualitative method. The data in her study were collected from online sites on Youtube. She used the theory by (Barthes, 1977) in analyzing the denotative meaning and connotative meaning.

The third thesis was written by (Ashrama, 2019) entitled “Semiotic Analysis In The Body Shop Advertisement”. The study focused on analysing the verbal and visual signs and the meaning of The Body Shop advertisements. There were 8 advertisements used as data source. The data in this study were collected from the website of The Body shop through observation method. The method used in the analysing the data was qualitative method. The writer used formal and informal method in finding presentation. The writer used the theory of semiotics by (Saussure, 1983) and the theory of meaning by (Leech, 1974: 9).

## **3. Methods**

The data source was taken from pinterest. These data source was chosen because they used interesting verbal and non-verbal signs. It is very colorful and supported by good word choices which are interesting to analyze and it is become a media to persuade people to do positive things in a unique and attractive ways. The data were collected by using observation method. In applying observation method, there are several steps in collecting data. First, searching the public service advertisements in the website. Second, downloading the advertisement. Third, reading and note taking important informations from the advertisement which related to the scope of the study. Forth, the data were classified into verbal and non-verbal signs.

In analyzing the data, this study is using qualitative method. As the two problem proposed previously, the data of this proposal will analyze separately. There are some steps to analyze the data. First, the verbal and non-verbal signs were analyzed by theory (Saussure, 1983). Second, the meaning of verbal and non-verbal signs were analyzed by the theory of (Leech, 1981). In finding presentation, the researcher used formal and informal method to present the finding.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

This part was presented the result and the analysis of this study The verbal and visual sign was presented using table and the meaning of the signs was explained descriptively.

##### A. The Result of Verbal and Visual Sign of Public Service Advertisement

TABLE 1  
The Verbal and Visual Sign of Public Service Advertisement

Advertisements				Verbal Signs	Visual Signs
Saving Water Advertisement	Public	Service		1. Think about what you could save when you save water.	1. There is a running tap which seem wasting water 2. There are stacking pipes on the grey wall which make the shape of tree. 3. There is a connection between the water tap in the washbowl to the pipes.
Saving Energy Advertisement	Public	Service		1. Save the world! 2. Turn off your light!	1. There is a bulb that cover with green field on the top. 2. The humans are playing and enjoying the beautiful environment.
Driving Public Service Advertisement				1. Don't talk while he drives	1. There is a picture of woman who is still holding a phone in the kitchen and the blood comes out from the phone.
Second Driving Advertisement	Public	Service		1. Sleepiness is stronger than you	1. There is a car is going to hit a man and young boy on the sleepy eye background.
Drinking Public Service Advertisement				1. Stop the violence 2. Don't drink and drive	1. There are two cars that crashing each others. 2. There is someone's hand just punching a man's face.

Based on the table above, there are five (5) advertisements which had been selected to analyze. The research found each data contains more than one verbal and visual signs. The verbal signs were delivered in the arrangement of the sentences and the visual signs used to support the verbal signs in the advertisements. The visual sign consist of human, colors, symbols.

##### B. The analysis of Verbal and Visual Signs and its Meaning

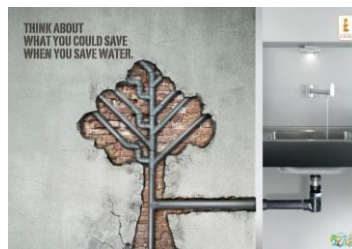


Figure 1. Saving Water

Data 1

Verbal Sign :

**1. Think about what you could save when you save water.**

There is only one verbal sign in this advertisement. This statement could be classified into signifier in verbal form which used in this advertisement. That verbal sign is “Think about what you could save when you save the water”. This verbal sign means to remain people to save the water by controlling the used of water. As we know, water is important to living things which is human and plant's life. When we save the water for nature, the plants and trees, then they can give us life too. Trees give us oxygen, store carbon, stabilize the soil and give life to the world's wildlife. Trees are important component of life. We must protect

them for better future. This statement can be categorized as reflected meaning because it is arise when the word of water communicated through the expressing of sense which is the message in this context is refers to the reader to pay attention and take the responsibility in using the water affectively for keeping the trees

Visual Sign :

### **1. There is a running tap which seem wasting water**

The first visual sign in this advertisement is that there is a water tap that runs while not used. The meaning of this sign represents wasted clean water while we can save it for something more useful. This sign used to remind people to keep our clean water for something which can give positive impact to our life in the future, for instance the plants can grow well then the animal and all human being also can get good food from nature.

### **2. There are stacking pipes on the grey wall which make the shape of tree**

The second visual signs in this advertisement are stacking pipes on the grey wall which shape like a tree. The pipes are tools to distribute water from one place to another. Beside for human need, water also help trees growing up. The existence of trees gives us both positive and negative impacts which depend on how they are treated. Trees give so many advantages in human life if they are well treated. By seeing all the impact of trees, we can take attention in value of trees in our lives. Thus we should not cut trees, but we need to save the trees to save our life in the future.

### **3. There is a connection between the water tap in the washbowl to the pipes**

The last visual signs that found in this advertisement is a connection between the water tap in the washbowl to the pipes that make a shape of tree. By looking at the visual sign, the meaning will tell that the water can save the plant's life because plants need water to stay alive for better future. Trees play a great role in cleaning the air, soil and water and thus making the earth a better place to live. Saving plants we are not showing any kindness to the plants, but we are showing kindness to our lives because life is not possible without trees on the earth.



Figure 2. Saving Energy

Data 2

Verbal Sign :

### **1. Save The World**

The first signifier in this advertisement is "Save the world!". This statement means we need to keep the world from the problems which can give us the bad impacts for our future. Save the world means we need to give attention intensively to the Earth because Earth provides everything that human need to life. Those are oxygen from the trees, the water that needs by the living things, the food that provide by nature and the energy that we can get from the earth. This statement can be categorized as reflected meaning, because this statement refers to people to take the responsibility and action to take care of the world.

### **2. Turn off your light!**

The second verbal sign that can be categorized as signifier that found in this advertisement is "Turn off your light!". The meaning of this verbal sign is to remind us to maintain energy by turning off lights during the day that we don't use. By turning the light off, we are contributing to save the electricity for our planet. We can start paying attention to how many lights are need to be using in our house at a given time. Saving electricity is very important in this era because it could help to stop global warming and save a lot of money over time. The statement "Turn off your light!" can be categorized as affective meaning because it reflects to the action of people to save the world which is electricity by turning off the lights.

#### Visual Sign

##### **1. A bulb that covers with greenfield on the top**

The first visual sign that represents in this advertisement is a bulb that covers with greenfield on the top. The meaning of this sign is to present when people use the bulb effectively, we can save the electricity. By doing it, we can get green environment, keep the energy and avoid the Earth from global warming. The environment is strongly influenced by the used of energy. Humans need to balance the used of energy with the environment, then the positive impact will be received for the future, such as a fresh air and environment due to there is no pollution caused by global warming by the use of excessive lighting. This sign reminds people to turn the lights off because can give a warning dangers of using excessive light.

##### **2. Humans are playing and enjoying the beautiful environment under the bright sky**

The second visual sign that can see in this advertisement is humans are playing and enjoying the beautiful environment under the bright sky. This visual sign presents about humans can take the fresh air and the better atmosphere after they use the energy effectively. By using the energy effectively, not only human can feel the effect of the fresh air, but also the trees and the animals which are birds can live together So plants and trees help to generate fresh air. Besides that, when human get fresh air, they also can think clearly and it can help us to reduce the stress. We should plant more trees to keep the air fresh. Due to this, we should not throw wastes everywhere. We should try and keep our surroundings clean. This will helps us to live a healthy life.



Figure 3. Safety Driving

#### Data 3

#### Verbal Sign

##### **1. Don't talk when he drives**

The verbal sign that shows in the advertisement is "Don't talk when he drives". This verbal sign presents to people as a friends or families to do not disturb the driver when they are driving a car or riding a motorbike. Phone conversations are more distracting because the people talking don't have a shared visual environment. As driver if it really important or urgent, you need to find a safety area to stop and receive or make a phone call. This statement categorised as affective meaning, because the statement of "Don't talk when he drives" is emphasizing the effect of make a phone call while drive, because everyone has their responsibility to protect their own family.

#### Visual Sign

##### **1. A picture of woman who is still holding a phone in the kitchen and the blood comes out from the phone**



The visual sign in this advertisement is that there is a picture of woman who is still holding a phone in the kitchen and the blood comes out from the phone. The meaning of this sign represents of the danger of calling people while they are driving. This sign used to remind people to not talk with a person while driving. The picture of women who standing in the kitchen with her phone is trying to reach someone she loved in phone to talk while he is in the car. From the background, the researcher can see that the woman is a wife or a mother. She is talking with her family in the phone and it makes someone in the car is in danger. Then, an unexpected event is happened to her and her family. From the advertisement, we can see that the blood comes out from the phone. This sign give a strong message to people that the person who is in the car got car accident. He is less focus in driving a car because he needs to separate his focus to the road and to people who his talking with.



Figure 4. Second Safety Driving

Data 4

Verbal sign

#### **1. Sleepiness is stronger than you**

The signifier in this advertisement is “Sleepiness is stronger than you”. This statement means sleepiness can do more which can you and people around you in danger. This verbal sign is representing to the people who are sleepy but they are in driving a car. Sleepiness and driving are an extremely dangerous combination which can decreases awareness and greatly increases the risk of an accident. Driving when tired significantly increases the risk of a crash. Not only does it make us less aware of what’s happening around us, but it also impairs our ability to respond quickly and safely if a situation does arise. Sleepiness is stronger than us, it’s because a driver can easily go into a micro-sleep without even realizing. This sleep can only be for a few milliseconds, but it can be life-changing at the same time. Accidents resulting from driver fatigue, typically involve a vehicle that leaves the road and collides with another object, such as a tree, ditch or item of street. This statement can categorised as reflected meaning, because the statement of “Sleepiness is stronger than you” is reflect the feeling of the reader especially for the driver to always focus on the road to save their life and people around them.

Visual Sign

#### **1. A car that is going to hit a man and young boy on the sleepy eye background**

The visual sign in this advertisement that we can see in the background is a car that is going to hit a man and young boy on the sleepy eye background. This advertisement tries to warn people in driving when tired can lead to the negative effect of crashing. Falling asleep while you're driving can be very dangerous, both for you and others on the road. Nodding off for as little as three seconds while you are driving can cause a fatal accident. In this advertisement, the driver can make a big fault like ruin their future by accident or maybe until they die. There are some things you can avoid by resting if you feel tired. Try to avoid driving when you are feeling drowsy. If you find yourself becoming drowsy or distracted, stop in a rest area to take a 15-20 minutes nap to avoid falling asleep behind the wheel. It is better to keep ourself and others safe on the road, because we can see our family at home.



Figure 5. Drinking

Data 5

Verbal Sign

### 1. Stop the Violence

The first verbal sign is "Stop the violence". It shows the actions of people towards each other. Violence is an expression of aggression. There can be various reasons that cause this kind of behaviour. Various unfavourable social situations or circumstances in life affect an individual. The reaction to those situations is variable. This frustration comes out in the form of anger and violent behaviour. The reason that violence still exists today is because this link between anger and violence is also the hardest bond to break. This statement can be categorized as reflected meaning, because this statement refers to the actions and expressions of people towards each other.

### 2. Don't Drink And Drive

The second verbal sign in this advertisement is "Don't drink and drive", this sign is purposing people to make an awareness about the risk of drinking and driving, so people might want to think twice before driving under the influence. Almost everyone knows the dangers of drinking and driving, and thousands of people died due to car crash every single day. One of the main leading causes of injuries and deaths is drunk while driving. Many people do not really care about the fact that drunk driving is very dangerous and may cause a serious fatality to death. Every time that a drunk driver decides to get into the car, it puts everyone else on the road in danger. Majority of the time the drunk driver ends up killing someone else. Drinking and driving becomes very dangerous because in a split second you could ruin your future, injure or kill others, and tear a hole in the heart of everyone who loves you.

Visual Sign

### 1. Two cars that crashing each others

The first visual sign in this advertisement that we can see in the picture above is two cars that crashing each others. There are two cars, one is red which is be a representative to the person whose get drunk. The green car represent to another people that drive carefully and follow the rules but they could affect too from those whose get drunk.

### 2. A hand that punches a face

The second visual sign of the advertisement above is a hand that punch a face which means that the writer want to warn people's consciousness that get drunk while driving is really dangerous not only for themselves but also for another people. So, we need to be aware about safety driving because our family is waiting at home for us.

### 5. Conclusion

From the result and analysis above, it could be concluded that there were 5 advertisements that found in public service advertisement. The advertisement can influence the mindset of society because the power of media is very large and cannot be stopped, so it can be said that advertising can form a lifestyle of the people. Public service advertisements have good combination between verbal and visual signs are presented. From the verbal, those advertisements consist of text. It has excellent choosing of words to attract the public reader interest. By advertisement, we can make people to be aware to their environment. The public service

advertisement presents many attractive and unique combination between word choices, colors and pictures than other advertisements that make public aware of an important issue and lead them to take a specific action.

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