

Semiotic Analysis of *Dove's* Femvertising

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to know in what ways the verbal (oral mode) and non-verbal (visual mode and gestural mode) semiotic resources help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising. The study used the Multimodal approach to help analyze the data. The writer collected and analyzed the data from *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. The findings showed that the verbal semiotic resources help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising by orally informing the audiences about the problems and arguments that are faced by the women in the video and how they responded to the problems in order to empower all the women. Meanwhile, the non-verbal semiotic resources help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising by revealing women in the authentic form and outside of traditional gender stereotypes so that they can deliver predominantly pro-female messages that can empower themselves and other women who are facing the similar problems as they do. The non-verbal semiotic resources are delivered by using the gestures (e.g. facial expression and body language) and objects (e.g. outfits, dominated background color, focus of the camera) in the video. In conclusion, I observe these semiotic resources are important to help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising.

Keywords: Femvertising, Multimodal, Verbal semiotic resources, Non-verbal semiotic resources

INTRODUCTION

Advertisement plays an important role in persuading people to purchase products and services. As a result, companies try to innovate ways to attract customers' attention by using different kinds of advertisements. One kind of advertisement that attracts our attention is femvertising. Currently, femvertising is one kind of advertisement that receives much attention from people and advertisers all around the world. Femvertising, according to Becker-Herby (2016), is defined as "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls" (p. 18). In fact, the term femvertising has gained its popularity over the past 10 to 20 years since it proves to be effective considering that more than 90% of women are aware of at least one femvertising, which helps to build brand awareness and favorability in association with pro-woman messaging (Castillo, 2014, as cited in Case, 2019, p. 36).

Since femvertising has gained its popularity throughout the years, it has started to appear frequently in industry-focused publications such as *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Adweek*, and *The Huffington Post* (Brennan, 2015). Due to this, in 2015, *SheKnows Media* introduced the first-ever *Femvertising Award* to highlight brands that produce creative femvertising to dismantle gender stereotypes and empower women (Brennan, 2015). Not only that, but femvertising is also proven to be effective in driving sales. This is proven from the result of the survey that was conducted by *SheKnows Media* in 2014. The result stated that "52% of the women surveyed reported purchasing a product because they liked how a brand portrayed women in their advertisements" (SheKnows Media, 2014). This indicates that more than half of women purchase a product due to the way how women are portrayed in femvertising.

In this study, we are interested in analyzing *Dove's* femvertising. This brand is chosen because it is considered as the originator of femvertising (Dan, 2017). Furthermore, according to the official website of *Femvertising Awards*, the only brand from *Unilever* which is considered to publish femvertising is *Dove* (Femvertising Awards, 2020). However, one of *Dove's* femvertising which attracts our interest is *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. This is because *Dove's My Beauty My Say* produced the highest number of viewers. AdAge (2016) highlights that *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video rose to the top of the viral video chart with the number of 10.5 million video viewers. Moreover, *Dove* received the *Shorty Social Good Award* by producing *My Beauty My Say* video (Bridget Strawn, n.d.). The *Shorty Social Good Award* is an award that is given to honor brands that provide social goods to make the world a better place (Mirrored Media, 2020). Besides receiving an award, *Dove's My Beauty My Say* is interesting because we find that there are many semiotic resources that can be analyzed in this femvertising. Hence, we analyzed *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video by using the semiotic modes theory. This is going to be done so that we could figure out in what ways the verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources can help a particular femvertising meet the criteria of femvertising.

In order to produce advertisements, an advertiser needs to make efforts to account for various semiotic modes such as colours, animations, images, and gestures in order to create the meaning of advertisements (Rubio, 2018; Periasamy, Gruba, & Subramaniam, 2015). Kress (2010), mentions that "mode is a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning" (p. 79). The meaning of the context is conceivable to be shown through a chosen mode (Kress, 1993, as cited in Gee & Handford, 2012, p. 37). Therefore, semiotic modes are significant since they help to create the meaning of advertisement (Rubio, 2018). Hence, we analyzed *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video by using the semiotic modes theory. This is going to be done so that we could figure out in what ways the verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources can help a particular femvertising meet the criteria of femvertising. We analyzed this because we find that semiotic resources might be significant to help a particular femvertising meet the criteria of femvertising.

We used the Multimodal approach in this study since Multimodal Discourse Analysis is an effective theory for analyzing the chosen femvertising. Paltridge (2012), mentions that Multimodal Discourse Analysis is "How texts draw on modes of communication such as pictures, film, video, images and sound in combination with words to make meaning" (p. 170). Therefore, we used two major theories from Chan and Chia (2014) and Becker-Herby (2016) in this study. We used Chan and Chia's (2014) types of semiotic modes theory, which consist of the audio mode, gestural mode, linguistic mode, oral mode, spatial mode, and the visual mode. This is done so that we can analyze the semiotic resources in *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. Nevertheless, for this study, we used three modes (visual mode, gestural mode, and oral mode), which will be categorized into verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources. This is because Chan and Chia (2014) offer many types of semiotic mode, but the majority of semiotic modes in *Dove's My Beauty My Say* are categorized into those three modes (visual mode, gestural mode, and oral mode). Furthermore, Becker-Herby's (2016) theory is used to explain the meaning and characteristics of femvertising. Also, we used Saussure's process of signification theory (as cited in Chandler, 2017) as the tool to interpret the data of verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources in *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video.

METHOD

In this study, we used qualitative content analysis to analyze *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. This study is considered as a qualitative content analysis study because it fits with the characteristics of qualitative content analysis that are proposed by Schreier (2012). Schreier (2012) states that qualitative content analysis will include (1) a sequence of methods during the analysis, (2) a writer as

the instrument of the study, (3) a focus of the data on selected aspects, and (4) a result of the study that is derived from the writer's interpretation.

The data of the study was the verbal resources (oral mode) and non-verbal semiotic resources (gestural mode and visual mode) from *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. We chose the data based on the appearance of the women in the scenes of the video. The data were categorized into two, the verbal resources (oral mode) and non-verbal semiotic resources (gestural mode and visual mode) from *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. Hence, we collected the verbal semiotic resources (oral mode) by transcribing the dialogue speech and monologue speech which are produced from *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. Next, we collected the non-verbal semiotic resources (gestural mode and visual mode) by observing and screenshotting the visuals (images of people, objects, places, colors, and lightings) and gestures (facial expressions, body gestures, and eye movements) that are produced as the criteria of femvertising from *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video. Furthermore, in order to analyze all the data, we compiled it into a form of table. The table consists of figure, screen shot, visual mode, gestural mode, and oral mode columns. After we finished compiling the data in the table, we proceeded to analyze the scenes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through semiotic analysis on *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video, we would like to find out in what ways the verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources can help a particular femvertising meet the criteria of femvertising. Our findings reveal that both the verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources are significant in order to help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising. This is because each semiotic resource has its own unique ways to deliver the message of women empowerment to the audiences.

The Verbal Semiotic Resources in Dove's My Beauty My Say Video

Oral mode refers to the dialogue speech and monologue speech. This mode is considered a verbal resource since it refers to the spoken words by speakers. Hence, the data of oral mode in *Dove's My Beauty My Say* femvertising video are the dialogue speech and monologue speech that are produced by the speakers from the femvertising video.



Figure 1
Oral mode: "They said that I was too pretty to fight. Aw she can't fight"



Figure 2
Oral mode: "You are going to mess up that beautiful face"

In analyzing the verbal semiotic resources, as shown in Figure 1, here the verbal semiotic resources in *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video wants to show that the society judges women by their appearance. This can be seen from the figure where a female boxer named Heather says "*They said I was too pretty to fight. Aw she can't fight*". It can be identified that the word "*They*" signifies people. The data shows that people are judging Heather's physical appearance since they mention Heather is

too attractive to do boxing. Through this scene, *Dove* wants to reveal that society still judges women by how they look. At a denotative level, the verbal semiotic resources in Figure 1 symbolizes that Heather is too good-looking to fight. However, at a connotative level, this figure signifies that Heather should not fight because she is a woman.

The verbal semiotic resources from Figure 1 also highlight the fact that society has the stereotype of what women should be. According to WNYC News (2012), until the early 19th century, women's boxing was not accepted in the Olympics. Moreover, Schonbek (2017) states that WBC first considered sanctioning women's boxing in 1995. These facts indicate that women were not accepted to do boxing in the first place, and it has only been almost two decades since women were accepted to do boxing by the World Boxing Council (WBC). As a result, these facts reveal that boxing is still something new to women, which causes people to stereotype women not to do boxing, as reflected in this figure. Despite the fact that Heather practices boxing, which is not a traditional sport for women, she is portrayed as being weaker than men, implied by people's comment, "*Aw she can't fight*". In fact, supported by the rules and regulations concerning female boxers, Schonbek (2017) mentions that all women boxers' fights are restricted shorter than mens' fights. This is because the Press release explains that women's fight times should not be extended since women's endurance has been proven to be less than men.

Meanwhile, the verbal semiotic resources in Figure 2 highlights the fact that people do not treat women as human beings. Instead, they are treated as objects that are used for fulfilling men's desires. This can be seen in Figure 2, in which Heather mentions "*You are going to mess up that beautiful face*". This message implies that society is saying Heather should not fight since she could ruin her face. Devon (2017) mentions a study published by Girlguiding that half of girls feel stifled by gender stereotyping. This is because children as young as seven years old believe that their appearances are valued more than for their achievements or character. This study proves that women are still being pressured by what is told about their appearances by society. Hence, at a denotative level, the verbal semiotic resources from Figure 2 signifies that people are telling Heather to stop fighting since she could destroy her face. However, just as Figure 1, *Dove* wants to reveal that women's physical appearances are judged by society. Therefore, at the connotative level, Figure 2 implies that Heather should not fight since women are stereotypically portrayed as sexualized objects. In fact, Kant states that women are described as sex object, always accessible and available to men (as cited in Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014, p. 310). This means that women are expected to have beautiful appearances to fulfill men's desires.



Figure 3
Oral mode: "Cause my face has nothing to do with my boxing."



Figure 4
Oral mode: "I'm ranked No. 1 in the country and No.2 in the world"

The oral messages in Figure 3 signifies that women's skills should not be judged by their physical appearances. This fact can be seen through this figure, where Heather mentions that her face has nothing to do with her boxing. This is because in Figure 1 and Figure 2, she mentioned that people said she was too pretty to fight and she is going to mess up her beautiful face. Hence, at a denotative level, Figure 3 signifies that Heather as a woman believes that skills like boxing have nothing to do with physical appearances. However, at a connotative level, the figure implies that women's skills should not be judged by how they look. In fact, after Figure 3 ends, Heather continues her speech in Figure 4 by indicating the proof that her appearance is not important since she mentions that only by her boxing skill, she could have ranked number 1 in the country and number 2 in the world. Thus, this clearly shows more clearly that women's skills do not relate with their looks.

In conclusion, Figure 1 and Figure 2 display the opposite characteristics of femvertising that are mentioned by Becker-Herby (2016). This is because the figures show that there is a gender stereotype regarding women. The scenes imply the stereotypical portrayal of women as sexualized objects, which cause people to mention that Heather cannot fight. However, the characteristics of femvertising can be seen from Figure 3 and Figure 4. This is because Heather defends herself as a woman by replying regarding what people observe and believe about women. Hence, the figures present the push of gender stereotypes. Since Heather mentions that her face has nothing to do with her boxing, due to the fact that previously people mentioned that she is too attractive to fight. Therefore, the verbal semiotic resources help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising by informing the audiences orally regarding the problems and arguments that Heather faced and how she responded to the problems in order to empower all women.

The Non-verbal Semiotic Resources in Dove's My Beauty My Say Video

The data of non-verbal semiotic resources are categorized into two categories, the visual mode and gestural mode. Therefore, the data of non-verbal semiotic resources in *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video are the images of people, objects, places, colors, and lighting. Also, the facial expressions, body gestures, and eye movements found in the video.



Figure 5

The non-verbal messages from Figure 5 inform that *Dove* wants women to challenge themselves by having pride with their jobs, no matter how society judges them. As an illustration, the following scene (see Figure 5) features Grace, a burlesque dancer. As a burlesque dancer, the figure shows that she is wearing a unique earring and heavy makeup. This is because her job is to perform in front of audiences. Many burlesque dancers mention that burlesque is more than an art, since it is home for them. Moreover, they mention that burlesque provides confidence to love and accept their bodies (Theadelaidelife, n.d.). In fact, even though many people stereotype burlesque dance negatively, Grace's image in Figure 5 shows that she takes her job seriously since the figure shows her serious face. This provides a meaning that she has pride with her job, because she is the one who can control her body to perform in front of the stage. Therefore, at a denotative level, the figure

implies that Grace is doing her job as a burlesque dancer since the figure features her unique earring and heavy makeup. However, through Grace's image in Figure 5, at a connotative level, the figure signifies that every woman needs to have pride with their job, even though people might judge their jobs.

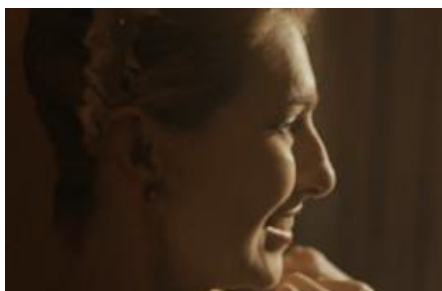


Figure 6

Through the non-verbal semiotic resources, *Dove* wants to reveal that women can be brave to take the job that they want to do, even though society might judge them. This is shown in Figure 6. In Grace's previous occurrence (see Figure 5), the figure showed that society stereotyped burlesque dance negatively. However, Grace's image in Figure 5 showed that she has pride with her job, which signifies that every woman needs to have pride with their job. Relating to the previous figure (see Figure 5), Grace's second occurrence in this video (see Figure 6) also shows the similar characteristics with the first figure (see Figure 5). In fact, Figure 6 shows an image of Grace's side face. Moreover, the image shows that she is smiling while showing her teeth. Body Language Project (n.d.) mentions that there are six types of smiles. Among the six smiles, there is one type of smile which presents Grace's smile, which is the broad smile. In this smile, the upper and lower teeth are made visible. The smile is intended to convey pleasure and joy. Hence, a broad smile is a true smile (Body Language Project, n.d.). It can be concluded that Grace's smile in this figure is a true smile which shows that she is happy for what she is doing. Furthermore, this figure is dominated by gold color. Colorgy (n.d.) states that the gold color is connected with passion and courage. Thus, this color symbolizes Grace's characteristics. Since she is courageous to take a job where society perceives her job negatively, and she is passionate about doing her job. This is shown by how she smiles. Hence, at a denotative level, Figure 6 implies that Grace is smiling. However, at a connotative level, the figure informs that Grace is a courageous woman and yet she is passionate to do her job, despite the fact that people look at her job negatively.

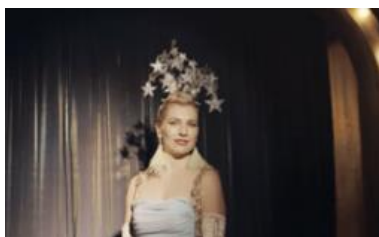


Figure 7

Just as Grace's previous figures in this video (see Figure 5 and Figure 6), through the non-verbal communication, *Dove* wants to notify that women can be professional workers by becoming passionate about their jobs in this figure. Previously, Figure 5 showed that every woman needs to

have pride with their jobs. Then, Figure 6 mentioned that women can be passionate just as Grace when working in a particular job. In this figure (see Figure 7), the figure shows Grace wearing unique accessories such as a huge crown and unique earrings. This symbolizes the characteristics of her job as a burlesque dancer. The figure shows that Grace is standing on a stage. This can be identified by observing her accessories, dress, and the light which focuses on her. Lastly, her facial expression shows that she is showing her comfortable and natural smile on the stage. At a denotative level, this figure symbolizes just as the previous figures (Figure 5 and Figure 6), that Grace, as a woman, can be a professional worker. However, at a connotative level, Figure 7 signifies that women can be professional workers by becoming passionate about their jobs, and they do not need to be embarrassed about their job. Since even though Grace's job is seen negatively by the society, she still works as a professional burlesque dancer.

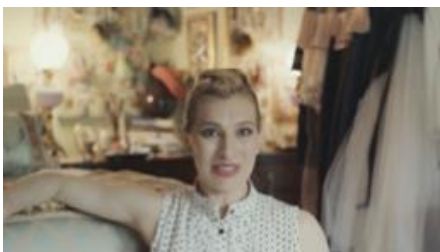


Figure 8

The non-verbal semiotic resources in Figure 8 indicate the fact that women can still have a normal daily life even though their jobs might be seen negatively by society. In Figure 8, it can be seen that Grace looks different from the previous figures (see Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7). This is because in the previous figures, Grace showed herself up as a burlesque dancer by preparing and performing on a stage. However, in this figure, it shows that Grace is not wearing unique accessories and heavy makeup. The figure also shows that she is wearing a casual top unlike the previous figures. Hence, it can be concluded that Grace is not working as a burlesque dancer in this figure. In her previous figures, there were arguments that women do not need to be embarrassed with their job and they can also be passionate about what they do even though society might see their jobs negatively. Hence, at a denotative level, Figure 8 signifies that Grace is currently not working as a burlesque dancer. Nevertheless, at a connotative level, relating to the previous figures, this figure implies that women can still have a common daily life even though society might see them negatively.



Figure 9

Through the non-verbal semiotic resources from Figure 9, *Dove* wants to inform that Grace, as a woman, deserves to be happy and she can be happy by empowering herself. In fact, Figure 9 shows Grace's front look, which presents her face clearly. Through her face, it can be seen that she is smiling. Hence, at a denotative level, Figure 9 only shows that Grace is smiling. Nevertheless, at a

connotative level, the figure signifies that Grace, as a woman, can be happy for who she is by empowering herself as a woman, despite the fact that society still judges her as a burlesque dancer.

It can be seen that the non-verbal semiotic resources in the above figure reveals that *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video aims to deliver predominantly pro-female messages that can empower all women, by showing themselves in authentic form and outside of traditional gender stereotypes in the video. Hence, in order to answer the second research question of this study, the non-verbal semiotic resources help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising by using the following elements. Firstly, the gestures such as facial expressions and body language help *Dove* deliver how Grace faced her arguments. Secondly, the objects such as the outfits, dominated background color, and where the camera focuses on the video help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising. The outfits helped identify why Grace was judged by society. Next, the dominated background color helped to discover what the particular scene wants to inform the audiences. Lastly, the focus of the camera helped *Dove* to inform the arguments and how Grace faced the problems in order to empower herself as a woman.

CONCLUSION

In this study, through the analysis of *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video, we observe that the criteria of femvertising are delivered through the verbal semiotic resources (oral mode) and non-verbal semiotic resources (visual mode and gestural mode) which are found in the video. The verbal semiotic resources are delivered in the form of spoken words, while the non-verbal semiotic resources are delivered through the images of people, objects, colors, lighting, and also, the facial expressions, body gestures, and eye movements which are found in *Dove's* video.

From the analysis, the verbal semiotic resources and the non-verbal semiotic resources show the characteristics of femvertising, that is, empowering women. The verbal semiotic resources, in the forms of the narration, dialogue and monologue speeches, reveal how a woman tries to defend herself by replying about what society sees and believes about women. This is also supported by the non-verbal semiotic resources in the forms of gestures (e.g., facial expressions and body languages) of a woman. The gestures present how the woman in the video articulates her arguments on how people judge and say about her. Next, the objects (e.g., outfits, dominated background color, and focus of the camera) also reflect the idea of femvertising. The outfits of the woman highlights the reason why society judges her. The dominant background color also helps the audience understand the emotion of the woman in facing her struggle. The focus of the camera informs the audience about the arguments of this woman, and how she turns her ordeals into a means of empowering her. The women in *Dove's My Beauty My Say* video face the arguments by revealing themselves in authentic form and outside of traditional gender stereotypes so that they can deliver predominantly pro-female messages that can empower themselves and other women who are facing the similar problems as they do.

In conclusion, we argue that both verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources are significant in order to help *Dove* meet the criteria of femvertising. This is because each semiotic resource has its own unique ways to deliver the message of women empowerment to the audiences. Hence, we hope that the findings and discussions of this present study would provide contribution especially for researchers and advertisers regarding in what ways both the verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources help a particular femvertising achieve the goal of femvertising. In addition, we suggest other researchers analyze another femvertising video by using another semiotic theory in order to see how a particular femvertising achieves the goal.

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