

Semiotic Analysis of Sephora's Beauty Campaign Video

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ABSTRACT

Social campaign has gained its popularity over these past years. With the rapid business development, many brands compete with each other to create a simple campaign video but still has a meaningful story. To analyze the data, the writer use semiotic approach. This study aims to discover the meaning of verbal and visual signs, and in what ways those meanings are conveyed in *Sephora's The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video. The findings show that in *The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video, Sephora strives to redefine the term of beauty which cannot be determined merely by particular criteria such as having a white and flawless skin, but beauty can be defined in all forms, sizes, and ages through the verbal and visual signs.

Keywords: semiotic; campaign; beauty

INTRODUCTION

Advertisement is produced to sell products or services through advertising. The number of advertisers who can produce a great advertisement is escalating these days. The choice of words, colors, and images are considered as the significant elements that can attract the viewers to purchase the products or service the company provides. According to Moriarty et al., (2015), advertising is a persuasive communication that offer the products (goods and services) which can fulfill customers' needs and wants.

Since the number of online users has been rising over the years, social campaigns have become one of many ways that most advertisers use recently—for instance, in beauty industries. Some popular brands, such as Dove and Nike have succeeded in creating interactive stories for their advertisements by promoting a body positivity image. Body positivity aims to help people to accept their body since all people deserve to have a positive body image regardless of how society imposes on ideal shape, size, color, and appearance. Due to the fact that the impact of the body positivity campaign can bring a powerful impact for the people, this also can help others to eliminate their judgment of following a particular beauty standard that has existed over a decade.

A research from Mintel (2021) indicated that more than 70% of adults acknowledge women's insecurities are affected by the beauty industry. Not only does the beauty phenomenon become a conversation between one to another, but it also triggers a lot of electronic media taking part to show the alteration of beauty concepts over time. Many beauty industries are passionately competing to create campaign videos that associated with women's problems by adjusting to the concept of beauty standards that has been created by the media since a long time ago. In most advertisements, beauty is always portrayed in the form of light skin which is believed to draw people's attention (Lestari, 2020). As a result, women who have dark or tan skin tone tend to lose their self-esteem. "A person's self-worth does not depend on the color of their skin" (Dark is Beautiful, n.d.).

One of the campaign videos that intrigued the writer to analyze is *Sephora's The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video. This is because the message of the video is easy to understand and relatable to women's problems that is happening these days. Instead of delivering a message

that normalizes beauty, Sephora has implied that every woman has their definition of beauty. The beauty they campaign for is the diversity of beauty that comes from the inside, not from physical appearance. *Sephora's* campaign video also received good impressions from 400 millions people around the world through digital and social media platforms (Botella, 2021). Over 80% of those people love the campaign. Furthermore, there are many signs that can be analyzed in this video. Thus, the writer analyzed Sephora's *The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video by using semiotic analysis.

Semiotics can be regarded as a process of communication. It implies that all forms of communication can be perceived as transmitted and received messages using various signs and social codes. "Social codes or cultural systems are seen as analogous to verbal languages in structure and/or functions (communicating or encoding meaning)" (Chandler, 2017, p.180). Danesi (2004) mentions that through the use of verbal and nonverbal modes, advertising has become an indispensable modern culture that is designed to affect the audiences' attitudes and lifestyle behaviors. The primary focus of the semiotic study of advertising views advertising as a sign-creating system. Hence, semiotics are significant since they help to find the meaning of verbal and visual signs in the campaign video. This will be done in order to find out what the meaning of the verbal and visual signs is, and in what ways those meanings are conveyed in Sephora's campaign video.


The theory used in this study is Peirce's (1860) Triadic theory (as cited in Chandler, 2017). Peirce (1860) claims that a sign which refers to something is called representamen, the object is considered as what it is being represented, and the interpretant is a sign that exists in the interpreter's mind. (as cited in Chandler, 2017). Only by referring to each other can these operate as a sign. Peircean theory is particularly useful in analyzing visual and verbal signs. This is because the aims of this study were to identify the meaning of verbal and visual signs, and also in what ways those meanings are conveyed in *Sephora's The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video. Therefore, Peirce Triadic theory is used for interpreting the data visually and verbally through the representamen, object, and interpretant. The interpretations take place in real-world circumstances and the sign meanings emerge in the context of use is well-suited to Peircean model (Chandler, 2017). All those signs allow people to think, relate to others, and give meaning to what the world presents.

METHOD

This study is used a qualitative content analysis. The data was taken from *Sephora's The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video on YouTube Sephora Switzerland. The data of this study is the visual and verbal (oral) signs that appear in Sephora's *The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video. The writer made a transcript of monologue speech for the verbal sign and screen captured the picture for the visual signs. After all the necessary data were collected, the data were analyzed by applying Peirce's Triadic concept which consists of representamen, object, and interpretant. This theory of Peirce was used to analyze verbal and visual signs in *Sephora's The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through semiotic analysis on Sephora's *The Unlimited Power of Beauty* video, the writer would like to find out the meaning of the verbal and visual signs, and in what ways those meanings are conveyed. The findings present that there are many verbal and visual signs that can be analyzed using Triadic theory (representamen, object, and interpretant). These verbal and visual signs have particular meaning that can empower women to love and accept themselves.

Screenshot	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
 <p>Figure 1</p>	Freckles are considered as something different	The little girl is not happy because of the freckles on her face	People don't like freckles because they feel that freckles are their imperfection


The visual sign in figure 1 wants to inform that women are concerned about their physical features because they feel different from other people. This can be proven from the expressions of the girl that she feels discomfort with her freckles by compressing her lips. Lip compression is most likely believed as a sign of dissatisfaction or uncertainty (Givens, 1999 as cited in Lewis, 2012). Furthermore, she also gives another signal for disapproval. She gives a vacant stare while looking at the mirror and she compressed her lips as well. It shows that not only is she confused, but she is also unhappy about her freckles. However, according to Ilicic et al., (2018), freckles are a sign of facial authenticity. They think that people with freckles can be distinguished easily with those who don't have any particular facial cues. This means that freckles are supposed to become one's uniqueness instead of an imperfection. Therefore, the message that Sephora wants to show is women should be proud of what they have because those can be their beauty aspects.

The expression of a little girl is portrayed that she is not happy with the freckles on her face (see Figure 1). This can be seen from how she compressed her lips and a vacant stare. Both of those signs are a sign of dissatisfaction and disapproval regarding how she is looking at her freckles. Compressing lips and showing a vacant stare are how the visual signs displayed in this scene. Thus, it can be concluded that the meaning of the visual sign is delivered clearly through the freckles since those are the most significant sign in this scene.

When looking at the mirror, a little girl says, "*When did I start to think my freckles looked funny?*" (see Figure 1). The representamen of the verbal sign in this scene wants to reveal that freckles are seen as beauty flaws. The object is women considered freckles as something that can destroy their beauty. The interpretant is many woman are not confident because of their freckles, especially in childhood phase. They don't like being ridiculed and stereotyped for something that unfortunately, they can't control. However, not all people have freckles. Thus, dark skin toned girls who own freckles are unique. Freckles are also believed as stained and unattractive face traits (Kan, 2019). Because of this stereotype, there are numerous pre teenage girls who don't feel comfortable with the way they look. However, the message that Sephora wants to emphasize is that freckles are a uniqueness of beauty that not everyone has and women should be proud of their freckles.

The word *freckles* has a special meaning for some people. However, others including girls think that freckles are their flaws. The most common anxiety that many teenagers experience when having freckles is low self-confidence. This reflects how a girl with freckles is hardly find a way to overcome her anxiety. However, freckles are actually a uniqueness or a sign of individuality that can make the people who have it different with others. Thus, it can be seen that negative opinion about freckles as beauty flaws are how the meaning of the verbal signs in this scene is represented.

Screenshot	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
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 <p>Figure 2</p>	Swollen eyes represent the expression of people who have cried	The girl is seen as a desperate and unhappy girl	The girl cannot accept her true self because she does not aware of it
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Through the visual sign, Sephora wants to notify that in this scene, the girl might not be in love with herself because she doesn't realize her true beauty. This can be seen from figure 2, where the girl is portrayed as a desperate and unhappy adolescent. Her swollen eyes symbolize that she wants to show emotional pain and melancholy feelings. The girl's expression shows that she must have experienced unfavorable things, such as being broken-hearted or being rejected by someone. The bad experience she has been going through creates a negative belief of herself. As a result, this negative self-perception produces low self-esteem. The impact of low self-esteem is this will make people reflect on their own values as well as considering their opinion that affects their thoughts and feelings (Fenell, 2016). Due to this matter, the girl started to forget who she really is. She doesn't realize if she is perfect and worth it to be loved. She is not appreciating herself the way in which she supposed to be, especially for body appreciation. Women are often focusing on physical beauty that they overlook the great potential of inner beauty (Nahai, 2018). In fact, women should love themselves because self-love means fully accepting who they are regardless of anything, either bad experience or others opinion. Thus, the message in this scene highlights that inner beauty is all that matters and women should love themselves more than anyone else.

The swollen eyes represent a desperation and unhappy feeling (see Figure 2). The girl seems have a problem that make her forget who she really is; as a result, her level of confidence declines. This can be represented as the sign where some women tend to put so much focus on physical appearance rather than accepting and loving themselves for who they really are. Therefore, the audience can realize that the meaning of the visual signs in this scene is expressed through the girl's swollen eyes.

The verbal sign that can be found in this scene is when the girl states that "*I'm not in love*" which makes the phrase "*not in love*" becomes the representamen. The object is women tend to forget how worthy they are. The interpretant is she lacks self-consciousness to love herself because she might be rejected by someone she loves. Lower self-love is mostly associated with society and personal pressures on appearance. It is very predictable that how society defines people has an impact on them. Body image is particularly seen as one of many factors that can affect people to have low self-esteem. This can be proven from the phrase "*not in love*" that could be referred to the feeling of low confidence. The girl seems frustrated and can't accept herself just the way she is. Therefore, the message that Sephora wants to convey is that women should realize that self-love is the best way to show how worthy they are.

The meaning of the verbal sign in scene "*I'm not in love*" is conveyed through the representamen in the phrase "*not in love*". This phrase can be referred to a situation where someone is having a difficulty to accept oneself. The girl is frustrated because she cannot accept for who she is and how she looks like. This can be the sign that there are still many woman who does not love themselves fully because they forget how worthy they are. Thus, through the phrase "*not in love*", the meaning of the verbal sign in this scene is delivered.

Screenshot	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
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 <p>Figure 3</p>	A woman is trying to hide something by touching her face	A woman seems insecure because of her wrinkle face	As people age, they started to feel insecure again
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The visual sign in this scene wants to convey that women should be more confident regardless of how old they are. Figure 3 depicts a picture of a woman who tries to hide something on her face. The way she looks at the view outside while touching her face refers to anxiety. This happens because she feels getting older can make her less beautiful. American Psychological Association (2012) states that one of the negative effects of anxiety related to the signs of aging is low confidence. It is undeniable that human desires, especially for women are having homogenous skin color and texture, less wrinkles and sagginess (Vashi et al., 2016). Because of this perception, women tend to think that aging is not a good condition to represent their beauty and it should be hidden. In fact, age is no longer a key factor of attractiveness. Women have to feel more powerful regardless of their age so that they won't lose confidence and still can show their power of beauty. Therefore, the message that Sephora wants to highlight is a beautiful face will age, but true beauty will last forever.

A woman wants to make sure whether her face is still fine by touching it (see Figure 3). She doubts if there is anyone who will love her face. Nevertheless, the woman should embrace how she looks like first rather than overthinking about what others' opinion are about herself. Because if she is always follow the beauty standards that has been created by the society, she will lose her confidence eventually. As time flies, she will be depressed if she cannot meet the beauty standards that everyone agrees on. Hence, through this picture, the meaning of the visual signs in this scene is portrayed well.

Due to her process of aging, the woman asks "*Will somebody love this face?*". The representamen of this scene refers to the word *love*. While, the object refers to one's affection toward something. This gives an interpretation that the woman feels afraid that no one will love her because her face seems old. Women are afraid of experiencing the process of aging because they believe that a wrinkled face will make them become less attractive. Age has a big impact on facial attractiveness (He et al., 2021). They believe that younger faces are more appealing than older faces. Ebner et al. (2018) reveal that female faces are much more negatively influenced by age than male faces. This means that because of the age, the number of women who feel insecure and less appealing are more than the men. Nevertheless, older women are rarely portrayed as insecure or self-doubting since they begin to care less about others opinion as time flies. Through self-love, women can adapt to their environments because loving themselves means they accept everything they have, including their weaknesses as well. Thus, the message that Sephora wants to notify is women should love themselves regardless of how old they are since self-love is the most powerful way to show their beauty.

The word *love* can have numerous meanings depending on the circumstances. Love is generally refer to affection. However, the word *love* is particularly a sign of acceptance in this scene. This indicates that women need others' validation to answer their question regarding their appearance. Most of them tend to questioning whether other people will love their face or not when they undergo the process of aging. This proven that love plays a significant role in people's life. Therefore, the audience will realize that how important the word *love* is in delivering the the meaning of the verbal signs in this scene.

Screenshot	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
 <p>Figure 4</p>	A close-up picture of mature woman without makeup smiling confidently	Smile is the source of confidence and strength	Beauty can be seen through a confident smile

The visual sign that Sephora wants to show is that women are beautiful when they accept and love themselves. Figure 4 shows a scene where a mature woman with a short hair smiles confidently without any makeup. Her smile and gestures, which is keeping her head up and looking straight to the camera signify that she is happy because she can finally accept how she looks. In the beginning, she shows her insecurity, but in this scene, her insecurity transforms into self-acceptance. This what makes the woman more confident with how she looks and finally she realize that has a power, which is her beauty. Therefore, the message that Sephora wants to highlight in this scene is that it is the time for women to realize that the definition of true beauty is when they are confident, accept, and love themselves truly.

Through the expressions of the old woman that is presented in figure 4, the audience will understand the meaning of the visual signs in scene “*The power that I am me*”. This can be seen clearly that the old woman is smiling at the camera. Even though the woman is portrayed in a bare face (no makeup), her expressions still show that she is confident with how she looks like. She is proudly present her beauty through her sincere smile.

In this scene, the verbal sign that Sephora wants to present is that women’s beauty comes from within themselves. This can be shown from the old woman’s statement, “*The power that I am me*”. The representamen can be found in the words *I am me*, which refers to those women who are finally realize and accept themselves just the way they are. The object is the reflection of how every woman should perceive themselves as a perfect creature, value and love themselves more rather than allowing the flaws to lessen their self-worth. Thus, the interpretant is physical beauty is meaningless if people lack of inner beauty. Millard (2009) states that real beauty comes in various forms and sizes as well as its flaws, and – is the key to to rebranding, reconstructing women’s self-esteem, and redefining beauty standards (as cited in Rosida & Saputri, 2019). The message that Sephora wants to emphasize in this scene is inner beauty and self-confidence are the best ways to represent the true definition of beauty.

The words *power* and *me* are the signs that can represent how a woman should be in scene “*The power that I am me*”. The word *power* refers to hidden values that women actually have within themselves, but they do not realize it. The values are confidence and inner beauty. Meanwhile, the phrase *I am me* means women are still women. This indicates that women should realize and accept themselves because it is who they really are. If they cannot accept it, no one will. Through the words *power* and *me*, this way is useful for the audience to understand the meaning of the verbal signs in this scene.

To conclude, the message that Sephora tries to deliver in The Unlimited Power of Beauty video is to empower women to accept, love, and be more confident with their own beauty. Both verbal and visual signs present that every woman is beautiful regardless of age, body shape, size, and color. The verbal signs help Sephora to convey the meaning, which is a woman’s insecurity by telling the audiences orally regarding the problems and questions that she faced throughout her life, and how she overcome her insecurity in order to help all women to realize that beauty

comes from within themselves. Meanwhile, the meaning of the visual signs are presented through the images of the woman's gestures such as facial expressions and body language. Through this video, Sephora wants to emphasize the importance of self-love and self-acceptance toward women's body in order to make the viewers to stop being insecure and comparing themselves with other people, instead they should start to focus on their inner beauty because that is the only thing that matter.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of Sephora's The Unlimited Power of Beauty video, the writer found that the meaning of verbal and visual signs are presented through the representamen (sign) which are found in the video. The verbal sign is delivered in the form of spoken words and the visual signs are showed through the pictures of people, facial expressions, body gestures that are found in this video.

Based on the analysis of this video, the verbal and visual signs show a woman's insecurity of her appearance started from childhood to the phase of adult and how she overcome it during those years through the representamen, object and interpretant. The woman is doubting and questioning herself about her beauty, which means she lacks of confidence and tend to feel she is not pretty. In the form of monologue speech, the verbal signs highlight how women's insecurity can affect their life. This is also supported by the visual signs which are portrayed in the forms of a woman gestures (e.g. facial expressions and body languages). The gestures present how the woman in the video expressing her concerns of physical appearance. Through The Unlimited Power of Beauty video, Sephora wants to highlight a message to all women that self-love is important and inner beauty is all that matter.

Not only does The Unlimited Power of Beauty video adopt a simple concept, but this video also relates to women's problems these days. All the insecurities that a woman is going through in the video represents what most women are facing in reality. This indicates that Sephora has successfully created a story that can make more women to realize that they need to love and accept what they have rather than being insecure and always trying to achieve unattainable and unrealistic beauty standards. Last but not least, another messages that Sephora wants to show is that beauty is a quality that everyone has and this can be seen through a state of mind that makes people believe in their quality and value.

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