



## Illustrating Semiotic Constructs: Exploring the Icon, Index, and Symbol in Advertisements for 'Some By Mi' Skincare Products

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to examine the role of semiotics in advertising, with a primary focus on the signifier and the signified. Acknowledging that advertising is a powerful tool to attract consumers' interest, this study contended that precision in language usage is essential for efficiently convey the interest-bearing ads. This research employed a qualitative paradigm, wherein the data is systematically gathered, analysed, and expounded in accordance with the reserachers' interpretation of the theoretical frameworks. To clarify this viewpoint, this study, thus, utilised Pierce's semiotic theory of advertising, as the principal-analytical tool to scrutinise the meaning encoded in icon, index and symbols affixed to the products. Furthermore, the study emphasises the significant of Williamson's theoretical foundations as a framework in dealing with the complexity inherent in the investigation of semiotics in advertising, which defines advertising as both a borrowing principle and a social code, highlights the multiple dimensions of semiotics in the advertising domain. The findings attempt to shed light on the intricate dynamics of advertising through the lens of semiotics, providing a nuanced understanding of how symbols on skincare products contribute to the construction of meaning in advertising when viewed through a semiotic perspective.*

### INTRODUCTION

Marketing that is done utilizing media advertising techniques with as creative of designs as feasible may build a product (Syawaluddin et al., 2019). The objective is to get people interested in our products and convince them that they are worthwhile for people to buy and like. A lot of media advertising is done in the world of advertising through channels like radio, television, and mobile devices (Bhavsar, 2018). Advertising has grown increasingly prevalent, particularly in this day and age, in any application that is simple for anyone to use, such as e-commerce applications (Tokopedia, Shopee, Lazada) or listed on other social media applications like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and others (Voorveld et al., 2018).

As now we have an application that can utilize product adverts, verbal information or communication are no longer needed. Nowadays, many advertisements only contain symbols or other signs that can be analysed solely using the semiotic method. Therefore, just one poster can generate multiple points of view and the interpretation of a sign that is displayed in the advertisement (Sifaki & Papadopoulou, 2015). In

contrast, oral communication techniques, or SPGs, were more prevalent in old marketing strategies as pronunciation had to be repeatedly emphasized to various audiences (Combs & Bourne, 1989). In contrast, it now solely disseminates a product advertisement poster through multiple media.

In addition, with imaginative design to outcompete other product rivals in the business sector, product innovation must advance. Because product marketing through advertising often has a very wide audience, anyone may view it. Therefore, the role of influence can even alter customers' decisions to purchase a product (Nizam & Jaafar, 2018). According to Simmonds & Spence (2017), pictures, colors, logos, and other aspects of a product's packaging can influence how consumers view the item. The packaging's color influences perceptions and expectations about the food's flavour.

In audio-visual advertisements or print advertisements, it can be of particular concern to the wider community. Product endorsers are one of the factors that can influence the development of a product and also a consumer's interpretation of the message conveyed in an advertisement (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2021). In the world of advertising, the most important thing in advertising is visuals and language (Al Falaq & Puspita, 2021). Each part of the advertisement is a semiotic representation of the advertisement in which there is a sign in the form of an image, color, gesture, sound, word, or object (Najafian & Ketabi, 2011). Those forms are served to convey a message to consumers that are disseminated or advertised in the media. With advertising through social media such as TikTok or Instagram, consumers are more connected with attitudes and thoughts. Therefore, advertising through social media is expected to be able to increase awareness of products and brands that can motivate consumers to encourage a sense of interest in buying the product itself.

Semiotics is cross-disciplinary, just like philosophy and logic. As semiotics is needed in various fields of science, experts in this field study signs as it is a concerning aspects of social life. Thus, the signs that have been studied by experts can be analyzed using a semiotic approach. One of them is the figure of Charles Sanders Peirce (1834-1914). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conduct a semiotic analysis of print advertisements printed on social media, especially those printed on today's shopping applications. The products to be analyzed are skincare products originating from Korea, namely "Some By Mi" products.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method (Creswell, 2009), with an analytical approach to the skincare product poster "Some By Mi". This research is based on data collection as a data analysis procedure and also the interpretation of meaning in the intended data. For data collection, researchers used objects in the form of advertising posters found on official social media stores' e-commerce skincare products "Some By Mi", which are available on Shopee and Instagram. Semiotics is a branch of philosophy developed by Charles

Saunders Pierce (1839–1914). He was interested in learning about how people think and came to the conclusion that logic and semiotics are synonymous. The fundamental trichotomy that concerns the relationship that a sign has with its object through an interpreter what it "stands for" is the core idea of Pierce's semiotics. Furthermore, Pierce's semiotics also acknowledges three interconnected relationships and constructs meanings or values using things like icons, indices, and signs. The icon is a symbol that refers to the object of semiotics' similarity. A sign connected to a semiotics object that refers to the impact of natural or causal (natural or casual relation). A sign is also the relationship between a sign and a more complex semiotic object that is based on social convention (Merrell, 2001).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is a meaning and purpose to what is meant by a sign that has been made in every use of a sign. As a result, when creating signs for advertising, we do not do so arbitrarily. Naturally, there is a meaning associated with a product that will be advertised. According to Chandler (2022), semiotics is the study of the life of signs in society, both directly and figuratively, using both language and non-language. Advertising serves as a conduit for information transmission via electronic media and social media. The advertisements used in this study are digital, namely online promotional activities for the general public. Meanwhile, Fennis and Stroebe (2020), advertising is a type of online marketing that employs a paid message to disseminate information or data about a product.

This has become easier to disseminate information through social media advertising (Alalwan, 2018). There is no need to go around telling everyone. Similarly, in print media advertisements. We can use printed media to make it very appealing to consumers to buy our product, and it can then be displayed anywhere, even in strategic places where many people pass by that road. We may additionally utilize print media to distribute it in various locations as a form of advertising (Herman et al., 2022). As a result, advertising is the most effective way to spread messages and product information because our product advertisements are seen by a large number of people. And with these advertisements, everyone hopes to receive positive messages.

Skincare is essential for millions of people because it is required by everyone. In a comparable manner, "Some By Mi" products are well-known international products that are even known as skincare due to their high quality. Some By Mi is a combination of words that means "Something By a Miracle". This product focuses on the benefits of each natural ingredient, which functions to treat various skin problems that may be difficult to overcome. Therefore, Some By Mi products, have quite expensive prices, around. 300,000 rupiahs or above in one product. In addition, Some By Mi is a well-known beauty product internationally, especially in Korea. Because it comes from Korea. Its first product was the Some By Mi, AHA, BHA, and PHA Miracle skincare series which were identical in green. All Some By Mi product ranges are known for

skin barrier repair. Advertising can be analyzed by studying semiotic representations in the form of icons, indexes, and symbols (Faizan, 2019). The aim is to see the concept of truth or authenticity of a product, whether it is conveyed properly or not.



**Figure 1.** AHA-BHA-PHA 30 Days Miracle Acne Clear Body Cleanser and AHA-BHA-PHA Calming Body Lotion

The two products in this figure 1 are the same in terms of their use specifically for the body, but there is something that differs from the advertisement for the Some By Mi product, what distinguishes it is that first is that the words "Miracle Acne Clear Body Cleanser" with "Calming Body Lotion" look very good. It is clear that the writing on the advertisement for the Some By Mi product wants to unite the two products specifically for the body indirectly, such as a package for using skincare for the body so that its benefits are maximized, the benefit on the left is written: "Miracle Acne Clear Body Cleanser" to relieve acne prone skin (content BHA), calms acne (Truecica™ content), controls skin oil and pore care (Eucalyptus contains) and with tea tree extract for sensitive skin. Here the Some By Mi product on the left shows the target of the article based on a semiotic understanding is for people who have acne problems on their bodies, even lured can be for sensitive skin so it doesn't irritate, so anyone who uses the product on the left can avoid acne prone skin and what is more tempting than the product writing on the left is where the word "30 Days Miracle" can get rid of pimples instantly in 30 days but in this semiotic analysis, it is a + value or more attractiveness of a skin beauty product so that the eyes of the process can disappear for 30 days when in reality it can take more than 30 days with regular use and it depends on the skin conditions of the consumer's body that vary and the skin restoration process varies.

In contrast to the product on the left, the product on the right does not use the words "30 Days Miracle". Why can it be different from a semiotic perspective? Logically, the product on the right is a complement to the product on the left in the image. The reason why this ad is there are two different products

but the use is the same for body care, basically advertising is a promotional medium for a product, however, the advertising method should be as much as possible to make consumers tempted by the product being advertised through the image. Indirectly from semiotic analysis, there are both products in this picture to make consumers think that this product is a package for body care so it is impossible to buy one of the two products in the picture because later the results will not be optimal if you buy one, this is marketing tricks in advertising so that consumers can buy both products for maximum results.



**Figure 2.** Texture’s Difference

In the figure 2, you can see that there are 2 textured spheres from the two products, from a semiotic perspective, this advertisement also tries to educate the textured circle signs of the two products to educate consumers about the texture in the bottles of the two products and for ordinary people who are new to using body products. care for this sign is very important.



**Figure 3.** BYE BYE Blackhead’s Some By Mi Product



The next product from Some By Mi is BYE BYE Blackhead, as seen from the beginning looking at the advertising photo of this product which has its characteristics from the product name by using the word "BYE BYE" which can be interpreted logically through semiotics which means "Lost", and the same like the previous picture this product uses the words "30 Days Miracle" where the Some By Mi brand uses the slogan "30 Days Miracle" which can be interpreted as "30 days of care" in several types of products and is an attraction in the recovery of damaged skin in 30 days only.



**Figure 4.** Elements that are unrelated to ads writing

There is a slight error in the image of the circle on the lower right of the Bye Bye Blackhead product advertisement, there is a misunderstanding with semiotic analysis in the use of image elements with the caption "immediately brighter skin just by washing your face" and there is no correlation with the image elements of skin with markings above it. arrows facing each other because this violates the rules of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory because it is illogical and has a conflicting meaning, the elements of this product advertisement image should be replaced by using an image of a face shape with added stars to make it look like a face that has just been washed and looks brighter after washing.

The efficacy of the product is very visible from the writing of the product name and does not seem formal "Bye Bye Blackhead" which can be interpreted as "Without Blackheads" which is the efficacy implied in the product name. Further, the color selection of tea tree products is very suitable because it is following nature, the determination of the green color in these products indicates that green is famous for nature. So that it is more compatible with the color of product packaging that contains natural ingredients, namely tea trees. Therefore, the symbol of the product is easier to find or easier to analyze directly by everyone. Because automatically the thoughts of people who read and see the packaging will immediately be directed to nature. In addition, skincare derived from nature or plants is more well-known for having



ingredients that are good for the skin. But even so, there are also people who are not suitable, even irritated with products that contain natural or plant ingredients. Therefore, placing keywords on the front of the packaging, will make it easier for consumers to choose a skincare range that is suitable for them.



**Figure 5.** Snail Truecica Miracle Repair Product

For the next product, Snail Truecica Miracle Repair Starter Kit, judging by the pictures, it is clear that this product uses snail mucus content, therefore this product uses the name Snail Truecica by notifying directly that it contains snail mucus which is efficacious for strengthening the skin, skin barrier on the face. The advertisement in this image has given step-by-step instructions on how to use the Snail Truecica Miracle Repair Starter Kit which can be seen from the front of the box.

In the advertising image of this product there is the inscription "Some By Mi Special Edition" in semiotic analysis by Charles Sanders Peirce this is included as a sign, the inscription "Some By Mi Special Edition" indicates that the product Snail Truecica Miracle Repair Starter Kit is made specifically by relying on the content snail mucus in this product so that consumers think that only Some By Mi products provide benefits from the snail mucus content for facial beauty and there is no brand of other product that matches Some By Mi and there is also a correlation with the image of this product made "Special Edition" because the packaging is different from other Some By Mi products and inside is a 1 pack kit consisting of 4 products, namely: Snail Cream, Snail Toner, Snail Serum, and Snail Gel Cleanser. So, to make it look like a special edition, in one box containing 4 different kinds of products, this is an attraction for consumers, in terms of quantity, the number of products you can buy with 1 box can get 4 products.

The snail in this product is a signifier for protecting the skin barrier snails are animals in the wild but there are uses for natural protein which can help repair skin, then contains collagen which can help tighten pores, contains Elastin which helps increase skin resistance, contains Allantoin which can help calm

the skin and contains glycolic acid which can help control excess oil. Therefore, the slug is an icon that serves as a signifier of skin barrier protection.



**Figure 6.** Snail Truecica Miracle Repair Product

The text above is form of a sign in the form of an index. The name of the product above, namely "Snail Truecica" indicates that the sentence is included in the cause, while the points above are like in the sentence "removes acne scars, helps skin regeneration, improves skin texture to make it healthier, free of 20 harmful ingredients, and also can whiten and anti-aging" the sentence is included in the result. Therefore, the sentences in the picture are included in the index because of the cause and effect in the text.

Based on the data that has been collected above and also analyzed with the semiotic theory of skincare product advertisements from Some By Mi. there is a series of analyzes of icons, indexes, and also symbols in it. Therefore, it can be concluded that the product advertisement images above contain many signs that can be analyzed and associated with the semiotic theory. For example, the skincare series from the "Snail Truecica Miracle Repair" category includes three types of semiotics. One of them in the 4th advertisement image has an index because the image contains a cause-and-effect sentence. Then, in the product, there is also an icon as a signifier of skin barrier protection.

### Icon

Thus, the icon in the image below, namely "Some By Mi" (body cleanser and body lotion) is the advertised product icon. Judging from the advertising poster, it is quite attractive to consumers because the packaging is very prominent in the packaging of Korean products which are already well known for the aesthetics of all products in Korea. Further, Korea is known for its white and smooth skin, so many people are interested in these products. Furthermore, Korea is known for skincare products that are good for the



skin, so if it is advertised and sold overseas, particularly in Indonesia, where there are many Korean fans, it can increase interest in these skincare products.

According to Damisch (2020), he stated that icons have several types, one of which is "image", which means that an image is a sign without realizing it is an icon. By displaying quality, creative and innovative displays. For example, like the ad image in the explanation below about the skincare product image, Some By Mi. The icon is the main key or the first point of view for the consumer. Hence, in making and determining an advertising image, it is expected that it is of good and correct quality (Hendro, 2020). Because if not, the product that we make, no matter how we make it, no matter how good we make it if in making advertising posters it is less attractive and of poor quality, then it is very unfortunate because it is very likely that the product may not have or even have only a few enthusiasts. Because basically the attractiveness of a product that is first seen by consumers is how we market it to provide information to consumers. Such as making quality icons, choosing polite and good language or words, selecting appropriate colors, and so on.

### **Index**

While the index is a sign that comes from a source that can be seen, heard, and so on. In addition, the index is also a significant relationship between the signifier and the signified, which has a natural form. For example, the word "tea tree" on the Some By Mi packaging is green below, that is, the writing means that "tea tree" there indicates that there is a "tea tree" content in the product with unique benefits in it. Because the product is made by Some By Mi, not just one. However, there are several types, therefore in each type, of course, the contents, characteristics, colors, and benefits vary. In addition to examples of products in the "tea tree" category.

An example of a product that we can see from an advertisement image or poster for the "snail truecica" category is that on each snail product packaging there is a picture of a snail, which means that it indicates the presence of snail content which is the main key or characteristic of this type of product, that skincare is red. This is a type of skincare that contains snails in each type of product such as serum, toner, cream, and so on, which indicates that the product is specifically for facial skin complaints that have dry and rough skin, irritation, enlarged pores, sensitive skin, oily skin. remove excess oil. Therefore, Some By Mi products make different packaging as a characteristic of each product category they have.

### **Symbol**

The symbol is a sign that is different from the index, meaning that the symbol is not natural. Rather, it is arbitrary, which means that a sign is following the community's agreement. For example, the word "mother" indicates that the mother is an adult or elderly woman who has given birth to us. The automatic

thing is that everyone knows when there is a sign of a mother or the word "mother" anywhere, we all automatically think that the mother is the person who has given birth to all of us.

Meanwhile, according to Black et al. (2018), the empty symbol is a symbol that uses words that are generally used but the meaning is automatically known by everyone or it can also be called a cliché. The states about natural symbols, namely words that contain natural elements which was created to reveal the symbols of natural reality as material for the projection of human life (Cobley & Machin, 2019). One example is the type of product that is in the "tea tree" category, which is a symbol of nature, that everyone immediately thinks that the product is genuine from nature because it comes from a tree that is in nature, so the properties of the ingredients are more natural and usually very good for the skin or face.

## CONCLUSION

Advertising is a communication medium in providing information that will spread widely to the public. Which works both for sellers or entrepreneurs and for customers or everyone. In facilitating the buying and selling system or conveying information that will be widely disseminated to the public. Advertising is included in the media and culture industry. Thus, advertising can shape consumers' minds to be influenced by advertising. Each advertisement has its value and meaning which can give rise to different perceptions and interpretations because advertisements contain many social phenomena which are expressed in the form of visual signs. In addition, in the skincare series in the first picture, namely the product category "Some By Mi AHA, BHA, PHA, Miracle" there is also a symbol. One of them is included in the natural symbol because there is the word "tea tree" on each product packaging, which means that there is "tea tree" content in the product, so it is included in the natural symbol, that everyone immediately thinks that the product is genuine from nature because it comes from a tree that is in nature, so the properties of the ingredients are more natural, natural, and usually very good for the skin face.

The color determinations and also the series contained in product advertisements are sufficient to attract the attention of consumers by selecting appropriate colors and symbols as well as the relationship between the signs and the products being sold. One of them is the relationship between the packaging and the distinctive characteristics that are owned in each product category, for example, such as the linkage of the snail image printed on the packaging and also the color of the packaging is related to the content in the product and is not deviated or arbitrary in the selection. Therefore, the above analysis is sufficient to explain the semiotic relationship with an advertisement for the "Some By Mi" skincare product.



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