

BARTHES SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF BEAUTY PRODUCT ADVERTISING IN MARIECLAIRE.FR MAGAZINE IN JUNE 2024 EDITION

Tengku Ratna Soraya, Hesti Fibriasari, Rita Suswati

ratnasoraya@unimed.ac.id, caleapui@unimed.ac.id^{2,3}

Department of French Education, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia^{1,2} Department of English Education, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia³

ABSTRACT

The meaning is constructed and communicated through visual and linguistic elements in contemporary digital beauty advertising. In the era of accelerated digital media expansion, advertising has evolved into a complex system of signs that not only promotes products but also shapes cultural perceptions of beauty, femininity, and consumer identity. Online magazines, such as Marie Claire, function not merely as platforms for product display but as symbolic spaces where ideological messages are embedded within aesthetic representations. The June 2024 edition of Marieclaire.fr presents a range of beauty product advertisements that integrate text, imagery, color, and layout to create persuasive narratives directed at modern consumers. This study aims to analyze how linguistic messages (connotative visual signs), and uncoded iconic messages (denotative visual elements) interact to produce persuasive and ideological meanings. Furthermore, the research seeks to reveal how these semiotic components construct representations of beauty, lifestyle, and consumer aspirations within the sociocultural context of contemporary French media. This study employs a qualitative research design using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis model as the primary analytical framework. Barthes' theory distinguishes three levels of message in advertising: the linguistic message, which anchors and relay meaning; the uncoded iconic message, which refers to the literal, denotative aspects of the image; and the coded iconic message, which involves connotative meanings shaped by cultural codes and myths. Data were collected through documentation techniques by selecting and capturing relevant beauty product advertisements from the June 2024 online edition of Marieclaire.fr. The data were then analyzed systematically by identifying signifiers and signified elements at both denotative and connotative levels, followed by interpreting the broader myth or ideology conveyed. The findings of this study are expected to demonstrate that beauty advertisements in Marieclaire.fr do not merely present cosmetic products but construct symbolic meanings related to elegance, confidence, youthfulness, and modern femininity. Through semiotic analysis, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital beauty advertising operates as a cultural text that reflects and reinforces contemporary ideals of beauty and consumer culture.

Keywords: Barthes Semiotics, Beauty Products, Marie Claire Magazine.

INTRODUCTION

The global beauty industry is experiencing rapid growth alongside the increasing influence of digital media in shaping public perceptions of aesthetic standards. Online magazines such as MarieClaire.fr function not only as sources of information but also as agents of social construction that produce meanings surrounding beauty and the identity of modern women. In the context of marketing, advertising serves as a primary instrument for influencing consumer behavior through visual and symbolic communication strategies [1][2].

From a semiotic perspective, advertisements can be understood as systems of signs that carry multiple layers of meaning. The semiotic approach developed by Roland Barthes emphasizes the analysis of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, while also distinguishing between denotative and connotative meanings [6][8]. Furthermore, Barthes introduced the concept of myth as a form of ideology that is naturalized through cultural signs [8][10].

Beauty advertisements in the June 2024 edition of MarieClaire.fr present representations of women with particular characteristics, such as flawless skin, ideal body proportions, and confident expressions. These representations are not merely reflections of reality; rather, they are symbolic constructions embedded with ideological interests. According to Sumbo Tinarbuko, visual communication in advertising possesses the capacity to shape perceptions and social values through symbols and visual aesthetics [3].

Semiotic studies within a cultural context further assert that meaning is not fixed; instead, it is produced through the interaction between signs and their social context [4][5]. Therefore, analyzing beauty advertisements becomes essential to reveal how such meanings and ideologies are constructed and disseminated.

This study aims to describe both the denotative and connotative meanings present in beauty advertisements published in the June 2024 edition of MarieClaire.fr, as well as to identify the myths or ideologies represented within these advertisements. The objective is to analyze the structure of meaning in

beauty advertising using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, while also uncovering the underlying ideologies embedded in the ads.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using semiotic analysis. This approach enables the researcher to examine symbolic meanings in depth within both visual and verbal texts. The type of research is descriptive qualitative, aiming to systematically and interpretively describe the phenomenon under investigation. The data are derived from beauty advertisements published in the June 2024 edition of MarieClaire.fr. Data selection is conducted purposively, based on the strength of visual elements and symbolic messages.

Furthermore, the data are collected through documentation (advertisement screenshots), observation of visual elements, and analysis of advertising texts. The data analysis is carried out through several stages: identification of signs (signifier and signified) as proposed by Roland Barthes [6], denotative analysis, connotative analysis, and identification of myths or ideologies [8][10]. This approach is further supported by the perspectives of visual communication semiotics [3] as well as cultural semiotics [4][5].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. CREMES SOLAIRES ANTI-AGE : Sun Perfect SPF50 Lancaster



The advertisement for Lancaster Sun Perfect SPF50 represents a complex construction of meaning through a strategic combination of visual and verbal elements. From the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotics, this advertisement can be analyzed across three levels of meaning—denotation, connotation, and myth—which simultaneously shape a particular ideology within the discourse of modern beauty.

At the denotative level, the advertisement displays a sunscreen product in a bottle with a minimalist design, predominantly white with gold accents. The text printed on the packaging, such as “Sun Perfect,” “SPF 50,” along with claims like “Wrinkles – Dark Spots” and “High Protection,” literally indicates that the product functions as a skin protector against sun exposure while also serving as an anti-aging treatment. Thus, the denotative meaning conveyed is informative in nature: a cosmetic product offering high-level protection and skincare benefits.

However, at the connotative level, these visual and textual elements carry deeper meanings. The dominant white color of the packaging not only represents cleanliness but also evokes the ideal of flawless, bright, and unblemished skin. Meanwhile, the gold accents signify luxury, exclusivity, and elevated social status. The combination of these two colors symbolically constructs the image of the product as not merely functional, but also as a marker of a premium lifestyle.

Furthermore, the use of terms such as “Sun Perfect” and “SPF 50” goes beyond providing technical information; it creates a perception of absolute protection and perfection. The claim “Wrinkles – Dark Spots” reinforces the association that signs of aging are problems that must be addressed. Consequently, the connotation constructed is that ideal skin is protected, youthful, and free from imperfections.

At a deeper level—namely, myth—the advertisement reproduces an ideological narrative about beauty and the female body. Referring to Barthes' concept, myth operates by naturalizing social constructions so that they appear as universal truths. In this context, the advertisement constructs the myth

that beauty is synonymous with flawless and youthful skin. Aging is not viewed as a natural process, but rather as a problem that must be combated through cosmetic intervention.

Moreover, the advertisement also reproduces the myth that beauty can be achieved through consumption. The product is no longer merely a tool; it becomes a symbol of identity transformation. By purchasing and using the product, consumers are implicitly promised access to ideal beauty, self-confidence, and even a higher social status.

The implications of this myth point toward the ideology of aesthetic capitalism, in which the human body—particularly the female body—is positioned as an object that must be continuously improved and perfected. This ideology is also closely linked to the standardization of global beauty, which tends to be homogeneous and does not always represent the diversity of reality. In addition, there is an element of ageism, namely the tendency to perceive old age as something negative that should be avoided.

When related to the concept of the *“rhetoric of the image”* proposed by Roland Barthes, this advertisement demonstrates the function of anchorage, where textual elements such as “SPF 50” and “High Protection” clarify the visual meaning, as well as relay, where text and image complement each other in constructing the message. The absence of a human model in the advertisement further reinforces the focus on the product—Lancaster Sun Perfect SPF50—as a “neutral” ideal object, thereby rendering its ideological meaning more subtle and less explicit.

Overall, the advertisement for Lancaster Sun Perfect SPF50 does not merely convey product-related information, but also constructs a complex and ideological system of meaning. Through a layered semiotic process, the advertisement reinforces the notion that beauty is something that can be controlled, modified, and achieved through the consumption of specific products. Thus, this analysis demonstrates how advertising media functions as both a tool for the production of meaning and the reproduction of ideology in modern society.

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that at the denotative level, the advertisement presents a sunscreen product—Lancaster Sun Perfect SPF50—with SPF 50, which functions to protect the skin from UV radiation and reduce signs of aging. At the connotative level, the advertisement conveys several symbolic meanings: the colour white signifies ideal skin (clean and flawless), gold represents exclusivity and high social status, the minimalist design reflects modernity and luxury, and SPF 50 suggests absolute protection and security. At the level of myth, the advertisement constructs ideological narratives in which perfect skin is defined as spotless and ageless, aging is perceived as something that must be resisted, and beauty products are positioned as the primary solution for achieving an ideal identity.

2. DOUBLE SERUM FOND DE TEINT - Fond de Teint Sérums Éclat et Hybride



The advertisement image presented below features a cosmetic product from Clarins, namely the Double Serum Foundation Clarins. Based on Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis, this image can be examined through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. These three layers enable us to understand how visual signs operate not merely as representations of objects, but also as constructs of ideology and cultural values.

At the denotative level, the image literally displays a foundation bottle with an elegant and symmetrical design. The container is dominated by metallic gold on the upper part and transparency on the lower section. At the bottom, two liquids with different colors are visible—one beige (foundation) and the other golden (serum). The label “CLARINS PARIS” appears at the top of the bottle, while “Double Serum Foundation” is written in the middle-lower section, followed by the description “[Colour + Hydric System].” Additionally, a pump mechanism is visible at the top, indicating the product’s practical functionality. At this level, the image simply presents a cosmetic product with a premium design and brand information.

However, meaning does not stop at the denotative level. At the connotative level, the visual elements begin to construct more complex associations. The dominant gold color is not merely an aesthetic choice, but connotes luxury, exclusivity, and high quality. Culturally, gold is often associated with prestige and social status, thus reinforcing the product’s image as a premium item. Furthermore, the transparency of the bottle, revealing two different liquids, connotes technological innovation and scientific sophistication. The separation of two formulas (serum and foundation) suggests that the product is not merely decorative cosmetics, but also provides skincare benefits.

Moreover, the term “Double Serum” itself carries a dual connotation: first, enhanced effectiveness due to the presence of two active components; second, efficiency, as users obtain both makeup and skincare benefits in a single product. This reflects a modern trend in the beauty industry that emphasizes the concept of hybrid beauty—the integration of decorative cosmetics and skincare. The word “Paris” also plays a significant role in shaping connotation. Globally, Paris is associated with fashion, elegance, and world-class beauty standards. Therefore, the inclusion of “Paris” strengthens the product’s image as a representation of sophisticated European beauty.

At the level of myth, Roland Barthes’ analysis reveals how these signs construct broader ideological meanings. The product—Double Serum Foundation Clarins—is not merely presented as a cosmetic tool, but as a symbol of a modern lifestyle that integrates beauty, skin health, and social status. The myth being constructed is that ideal beauty is not only superficial but also derived from deep care. In other words, this foundation does not simply conceal imperfections; it also “treats” the skin, thereby producing a form of beauty that appears more authentic and natural.

In addition, there is a myth of efficiency and practicality in modern life. The “two-in-one” concept reflects the values of contemporary capitalism, which prioritize productivity and time efficiency. Consumers are implicitly constructed as busy individuals who require multifunctional products. In this context, Clarins is not merely selling a product, but also offering a lifestyle solution aligned with the demands of modernity.

At a deeper level, the myth embedded in the advertisement is also related to the social construction of female beauty. The product implicitly reproduces the idea that the ideal woman is one who is capable of maintaining both her appearance and skin health, supported by modern technology and premium products. This demonstrates how the beauty industry contributes to shaping standards of beauty that are often exclusive and oriented toward particular social classes.

From a visual standpoint, the minimalist composition of the image, with its white background, also carries connotative and mythological meanings. The white background creates an impression of cleanliness, sterility, and scientific credibility, reinforcing the narrative that the product is safe and research-based. At the same time, this simplicity directs full attention to the product, emphasizing its position as a high-value central object.

Overall, from the perspective of Barthesian semiotics, this image functions not merely as a representation of a cosmetic product, but as a complex system of signs. At the denotative level, it presents the object as it is. At the connotative level, it constructs associations of luxury, innovation, and modern beauty. Meanwhile, at the level of myth, it reproduces ideologies concerning beauty standards, efficient lifestyles, and capitalist values within the global beauty industry. Thus, this image exemplifies how advertising visuals operate ideologically in shaping consumer perceptions and desires.

3. Les Parfums Chanel



The image presented displays three perfume bottles from the fashion house Chanel, namely Coco Parfum Chanel, Chanel N°19 Eau de Parfum, and Chanel N°5 Eau de Parfum. The three bottles are arranged horizontally against a white background filled with irregular vertical black lines. Within the framework of Roland Barthes' semiotics, this image can be analyzed through three levels of meaning—denotation, connotation, and myth—which progressively reveal how visual signs operate from representation to ideology.

At the denotative level, the image literally shows three rectangular perfume bottles with slightly rounded edges. Each bottle features a transparent, geometrically shaped cap that appears elegant. The label on the left bottle reads "COCO PARFUM CHANEL PARIS" on a black background; the middle bottle reads "N°19 CHANEL PARIS EAU DE PARFUM" on a white background; and the right bottle reads "N°5 CHANEL PARIS EAU DE PARFUM," also on a white label. The liquid colors differ in each bottle: golden yellow in the left bottle, light green in the middle, and amber yellow in the right. The background consists of a black-and-white striped pattern resembling a graphic or artistic texture. At this level, there is no hidden meaning—the image simply presents three perfume products from the same brand with different variants.

However, at the connotative level, these visual elements begin to construct a deeper network of meanings. The minimalist and symmetrical bottle design connotes refined simplicity, a hallmark of Chanel's aesthetic identity. The absence of excessive ornamentation reflects the philosophy of *less is more*, which, in Western cultural contexts, is often associated with upper-class luxury. The colors of the perfume liquids also carry specific connotations: the golden hues of Coco and N°5 suggest warmth, sensuality, and opulence, while the light green of N°19 connotes freshness, naturalness, and perhaps individuality or boldness of character.

The label bearing the word "Paris" is not merely a geographical reference, but a powerful symbolic marker. Paris is globally regarded as a center of fashion and beauty, and thus its inclusion connotes cultural legitimacy and high aesthetic value. In addition, the use of numbers in the perfume names (N°5 and N°19) conveys exclusivity and uniqueness. These numbers function not only as product identifiers but also evoke a sense of mystery and iconic status—particularly N°5, which has long been recognized as a classic symbol in the world of perfumery.

The irregular black-and-white striped background also serves a connotative function. It creates a strong visual contrast with the clean and orderly perfume bottles. This contrast can be interpreted as representing the tension between a complex, chaotic world and products that offer order, beauty, and control. In this sense, perfume is positioned not merely as an aesthetic object, but as a means of shaping personal identity amid the complexities of modern life.

At the level of myth, Barthes' analysis reveals how the overall system of signs in this image constructs a particular ideology concerning beauty, femininity, and social class. Chanel, as a brand, does not merely sell perfume; it sells a narrative of the modern woman—elegant, independent, and sophisticated. The myth being constructed is that by using Chanel perfume, one can access this identity. Perfume thus becomes a symbol of self-transformation—from an ordinary individual into a figure of sophistication and high allure.

In addition, there is a myth of timelessness and classicism. Products such as Chanel N°5 Eau de Parfum have long been recognized as legendary fragrances; therefore, their presence in this image represents not only a product, but also history and cultural heritage. This myth reinforces the idea that

Chanel is not merely a brand, but an institution within the worlds of fashion and beauty. Consumers who choose this product are implicitly associated with values of tradition, continuity, and prestige.

Furthermore, the emerging myth is also linked to symbolic capitalism, in which the value of a product is determined not solely by its material function, but by the symbolic meanings attached to it. The relatively high price of Chanel perfumes becomes part of this myth construction—that luxury and quality are accessible only through the consumption of certain products. Thus, the image functions as an ideological instrument that reproduces social class structures through visual aesthetics.

The visual composition, which positions the three bottles in parallel, also carries mythological implications. This arrangement creates an impression of harmony and balance, while simultaneously offering a range of identity choices to consumers. Each perfume variant can be interpreted as representing a particular character—sensual (Coco Parfum Chanel), fresh (Chanel N°19 Eau de Parfum), and classic (Chanel N°5 Eau de Parfum). In this sense, consumers are not merely purchasing a perfume, but selecting a narrative of identity they wish to embody.

Overall, through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, this image demonstrates that visual representation in advertising is never neutral. At the denotative level, it simply presents three perfume bottles. At the connotative level, it constructs meanings related to luxury, aesthetics, and identity. Meanwhile, at the level of myth, it reproduces ideologies concerning beauty, social class, and modern lifestyles. Therefore, this image serves as a concrete example of how visual signs operate in complex ways to shape consumer perceptions and desires within contemporary capitalist culture.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of cultural semiotics, advertisements do not merely reflect reality; they actively construct social reality [4][5]. In this context, media platforms such as MarieClaire.fr function as ideological agents that reinforce the values of capitalism and consumerism. According to Philip Kotler, advertising constitutes a core element of marketing communication strategies aimed at influencing consumer behavior persuasively [1][2]. However, in practice, these strategies often contribute to the formation of unrealistic social standards, particularly in relation to women's beauty. Furthermore, semiotic studies demonstrate that meaning in advertising is constructive and ideological rather than neutral [7]. Therefore, a critical approach is necessary in interpreting media messages. This study demonstrates that beauty advertisements in the June 2024 edition of MarieClaire.fr contain a complex structure of meaning, in which denotative meaning functions as the literal representation of the product, connotative meaning constructs images of ideal beauty and social status, and the resulting myths reinforce ideologies of consumption and global beauty standards. Thus, beauty advertising is not merely informative, but also ideological and persuasive in nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that future studies examine social media as an object of semiotic analysis. In addition, the public needs to enhance media literacy in order to adopt a more critical stance toward advertising. The media industry is also expected to become more inclusive in its representation of beauty.

REFERENCES

- [1] Philippe Kotler, *Manajemen Pemasaran di Indonesia*, vol. 1. Jakarta: Salemba Empat, 1999.
- [2] Kotler, Philip. *Manajemen Pemasaran*. Jilid 1 dan 2. Jakarta : PT Indeks Kelompok Gramedia". 2005.
- [3] Sumbo Tinarbuko;, *Semiotika Komunikasi Visual*, Jalasutra. Jalasutra, 2008.
- [4] Tommy Christomy, *Semiotika Budaya*. Pusat Penelitian Kemasyarakatan dan Budaya, 2004.
- [5] Benny H. Hoed, *Semiotik dan Dinamika Sosial Budaya*, First Edition. Depok:, 2007.
- [6] Roland Barthes, *Element of Semiology*. 1967.
- [7] "Aart Van Zoest. Panuti Sudjiman. Serba-serbi Semiotika. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka", 1991.
- [8] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. London: Paladin., 1972.
- [9] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1991.
- [10] Roland Barthes, *Rhetoric of the image*, in *Image–Music–Text*. London: Fontana., 1977.