A Semiotics Analysis of Gender Bias in YouTube Advertisements (The Case of ShopBack, Pomona, And Fave)

Analisis Semiotika Bias Gender dalam Iklan *YouTube* (Kasus ShopBack, Pomona, dan Fave)

Triana April Liani[1*], Ahmad Mu'am[2]
Universitas Gadjah Mada[1,2]
trianaaprilian@gmail.com[1], ahmadmuam@ugm.ac.id[2]

ABSTRACT

This study examines gender bias by identifying semiotic indicators in YouTube advertisements. This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology. The data consists of three YouTube advertisements for cashback applications, namely ShopBack (2018), Pomona (2018), and Fave (2019). This advertisement's semiotic signs are analyzed through the lens of Charles Sanders Peirces' Triadic Semiosis theory. In the meantime, Widyatama's categorization of Gender Bias in Television Commercials (2007) is utilized to examine gender bias in the three advertisements based on physical and psychological characteristics, regions of roles, and relationships between men and women. The data analysis found that this advertisement contained multiple examples of gender bias. Physically, female characters are shown for their beauty, and psychologically, they are portrayed for their emotions. This bias is also frequently manifested in the subordination and domestication of women. Women are typically portrayed doing domestic chores, even though they are seen outside the home. Women are considered subservient, perpetually subordinate, weak, and vulnerable compared to men.
Keywords: *advertising, semiotics, gender bias*

INTISARI

Penelitian ini meneliti bias gender dengan mengidentifikasi indikator semiotik dalam iklan YouTube. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi deskriptif kualitatif. Data tersebut terdiri dari tiga iklan YouTube untuk aplikasi cashback, yaitu ShopBack (2018), Pomona (2018), dan Fave (2019). Tanda-tanda semiotik iklan ini dianalisis melalui kacamata teori Semiosis Triadik Charles Sanders Peirces. Sementara itu, Kategorisasi Bias Gender dalam Iklan Televisi milik Widyatama (2007) digunakan untuk mengkaji bias gender dalam ketiga iklan tersebut berdasarkan karakteristik fisik dan psikologis, wilayah peran, dan hubungan antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Analisis data menemukan bahwa iklan ini mengandung banyak contoh bias gender. Secara fisik, karakter perempuan ditampilkan dengan kecantikannya, dan secara psikologis digambarkan dengan emosinya. Bias ini juga sering dimanifestasikan dalam subordinasi dan domestikasi perempuan. Perempuan biasanya digambarkan melakukan pekerjaan rumah tangga, meskipun mereka juga terlihat di luar rumah. Dibandingkan dengan pria, wanita dianggap tunduk, selalu tersubordinasi, lemah, dan rentan.
Kata kunci: *iklan, semiotik, bias gender*

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential part of our communication skills in everyday life. It can be viewed as a means of communicating with another individual. Language is made up of words that contain messages or concepts that need to be shared. Each word is a symbol with a message to express. The same notion is required to ensure that the sign is understood correctly and that there are no misunderstandings. However, the signs are not always fully recognized by one another. Everyone has their interpretation of meaning based on a variety of factors. Everett (2016) claims that no human language is devoid of symbols, and Callaghan (2020) added that people have the socio-cognitive underpinnings to create symbols. It can be deduced from this explanation that symbols or signs are an essential part of the language. Semiotics is a discipline that studies signals and symbols.

Semiotics can be used in various fields of science such as architecture, medicine, art, cinematography, linguistics, religion, law, anthropology, and communication. Advertising is a marketing communication activity that uses semiotics in production (Tinarbuko, 2017). Advertising is one of the strategies used to promote things to the general public, and it is used to persuade or even change customers' minds about buying a product (Abideen & Latif, 2021, as cited in Osei et al., 2022). Kotler & Keller (2016) mention that indicators of product innovation are new products, development of previous products, new product lines, or additions to existing product lines, including creating advertisements that promote the product. Semiotics in advertising focuses on the sign's recipient, message, communication channel, and object being addressed during its creation. The statement designed for an advertisement should reflect the product itself. The choice of targets to be achieved, visuals and taglines bring out an advertising character as a whole and continuously so that the message is easily understood by everyone (Haerudin, 2010).

Commercial advertisements integrate visual and written language. Each part of the advertisement is a semiotic representation of what is often referred to as a semiotic sign which can be in the form of images, colors, gestures, sounds, objects, words, or smells (Van Leeuwen, 2005), which functions to convey messages to consumers. Semiotics can be used as an essential thing that helps the audience understand what is contained in a statement and how to get the news, so it is meaningful (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Simmonds & Spence (2017) revealed that images, colors, logos, slogans, or other parts of a product could affect the perception of the product. Therefore, the advertiser should pay attention to those aspects to attract the market. The signs and symbols in the ad represent society's social reality, so advertising is very closely related to everyday life.

Advertising is vital in determining the success of marketing products and services. It aims to attract attention and persuade the audience to use, own, or buy a product, service, or advertised idea. According to Pujiryanto (2005), advertising can be divided into two. First is Above the Line; advertising uses mass media such as television, radio, printed media, the internet, and social media to promote the product. The second is Below the Line, a promotion carried out at the retail or consumer level to embrace consumers through posters, brochures, leaflets, and product sampling. Kim & Kim (2018) stated that customers are more connected in attitude and thought with social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. That way, advertising through social media is expected to increase awareness of a product and brand to motivate consumers to buy the product (Duffett, 2015). As many as 94% of internet users aged 16-64 in Indonesia access YouTube. This percentage is the highest compared to other social media platforms. Thus, YouTube is used for advertising various forms of products according to human needs, both primary and secondary needs (clothing, food, and housing).

The cashless society is the most recent trend in the digital world. Today, YouTube is commonly used as an advertising platform among startups. One of the growing startup

businesses is the digital cashback application. There are not only the conveniences of transacting but also many benefits of using digital cash. One of them is getting money back. Numerous studies have explored the impact of cashback programs on consumer behavior. Cashback incentives are found to encourage repeat purchases and increase customer loyalty (Bolton et al., 2000). Empirically, the only relevant study is by Vana et al. (2015), focusing on the profitability of cashback sites, and pointing out that cashback payments increase the likelihood of repeated purchases and their amount.

Cashback platforms also advertise their product using YouTube. ShopBack, Fave, and Pomona are examples of cashback platforms that promote their apps through their respective YouTube channels. This study will discuss the YouTube video advertisement by three cashback and rewards provider applications: ShopBack, Fave, and Pomona. Based on the researcher's observations, those ads from the cashback providers are dominated by female characters, more specifically, homemakers. The titles of the ads are "Semua Tinggal Kenangan," for ShopBack, "Cantik Itu...." for Fave, and "Dapatkan Cashback dari Struk Belanja Kebutuhan Sehari-hari" for Pomona. Those ads describe women with high needs who are happy to get cashback. Women are also portrayed as physical beings with weak personalities who solely exist in the domestic space or things about domestic requirements. The portrayal appears to be an accurate representation of women in actual life. These are frequently referred to as gender bias. Until now, the gender bias stereotype has inspired a variety of advertising concepts, including commercials for cashback applications. Those advertisements offer a cashback application with the idea that women can still shop and fulfill their needs without spending all their money. Thus, there is a bias regarding the reality of consumptive women. This bias makes the writer interested to know more about the image of female characters in these advertisements.

This study aims to conduct a semiotic analysis of the video advertisement for ShopBack, Fave, and Pomona to know whether the signs and symbols contained in the ads adequately describe the product. In addition, the writer also wants to see how the gender bias in the advertisements made by the three startups representing those ads.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to know the author's central problem: determining the image of women used by ShopBack, Fave, and Pomona in generating commercials on YouTube utilizing symbols and signs. According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research is often descriptive and employs an inductive analysis method. Qualitative research emphasizes process and meaning (subject perspective). The theoretical foundation serves as a guide to ensure that the research focus aligns with the facts on the ground. Furthermore, the theoretical foundation helps provide an overview of the study backdrop and a tool for presenting research findings. The importance of theoretical foundations in quantitative and qualitative research is fundamentally different. In quantitative analysis, researchers proceed from theory to data and then decide whether to accept or reject the hypothesis. The researcher begins with facts in qualitative research and then employs existing theories as explanatory material before arriving at a "theory." In light of the above considerations, the author believes that the qualitative approach is relevant to and consistent with the author's research. This approach explains the phenomenon through in-depth data gathering and the researcher as the essential instrument. However, this qualitative research process begins with data collection processes, data analysis, and data interpretation.

This study is descriptive. It explains the communication phenomenon's signs or study variables. The data collected in this study is illustrative, in words, pictures, and not numbers. The research report will include data snippets to provide a report overview. The writer employs descriptive research to address the question above.

In this study, the author uses non-interactive data collection techniques because the data obtained is in the form of advertising videos uploaded on the YouTube channel of each company. The theoretical assumption that the author quotes from Gunawan (2013) states that sources of qualitative research data other than humans can also include events, archives, and documents. The primary data in this study is a document in a video advertisement posted on YouTube.

The initial stage identified any telltale signs from ShopBack, Fave, and Pomona video adverts. The procedure includes classifying the data of semiotics signs from advertising based on Charles Sanders Peirce's theory and interpreting the data using Peirce's semiotics triangle, which consists of the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. That semiotic triangle is used because it is the most applicable semiotics theory to employ since researcher analyzed various texts and images related to gender bias. The author must understand the relationship between the three aspects of Pierce's theory so that the concept and meaning provided by the author in his work can be fully comprehended. The next step is the analysis using the categorization of gender bias by Widyatama (2007). In the last step, the writer draws conclusions based on the result of the research and representation of the finding.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the author discusses and presents the research's findings. This chapter is divided up into a few different parts. The first section describes gender bias in advertisements that will be used to analyze the ads. The second section examines the semiotic signs utilized in commercial videos.

1) Gender Bias in Advertisements

Advertising not only exploits women decoratively for the effectiveness of the advertisement itself, but it has also cornered women since ads will always remind women of their inferior status so that they need to use specific items to become a wife their husband loves. Goffman (1979) concludes that advertising portrayals weaken women through five categories in his book. The following characteristics are found in Goffman's Gender Advertisements:

1. Relative Size. Through relative size, especially height, social weight (e.g., power, authority, status, office, reputation) is expressed in social circumstances. The male's regular status dominance over the female will be reflected in his greater girth and height. There is a correlation between size inequalities and social weight differences.
2. Feminine Touch. Women are depicted more frequently than men, tracing the contours of an object with their fingers and hands, cradling it, caressing its surface, or "just barely touching" it. This ritualistic touching is distinct from utilitarian grasping, manipulating, and holding. Representation of Women's Images 985 This hierarchy of functions is depicted either inside a framework of occupational specializations or outside of them.
3. Function Order. When a man and a woman interact face-to-face on a project, the guy is more likely to assume the leadership position.
4. The Ritualization of Submission. Physically lowering oneself in any form of prostration is a traditional representation of deference. Similarly, maintaining the body upright and the head high is a stereotyped sign of arrogance, superiority, and contempt. The configurations of canting postures can be seen as an indication of submission, ingratiation, and appeasement.
5. Authorized Withdrawals. More frequently than males, women are depicted engaging in activities that isolate them psychologically from the social context, leaving them disoriented and vulnerable to the protection of others.

Those are the five categories utilized by Goffman in his study. In addition to those five categories, Widyatama (2007) proposed a classification based on Goffman's theory. In this study, Widyatama's categorization will examine gender bias in three advertisements for cashback applications.

According to Widyatama (2007), there are three ways to exhibit gender bias in advertising: 1) Ads containing both male and female models, 2) Ads featuring exclusively female models, and 3) Ads using only male models. Various commercials are displayed in the three advertisements used for this investigation. Those for ShopBack and Fave include male and female adult models, whereas ads for Pomona use female and child models. Even if the advertising does not involve two distinct genders, it might be biased if it depicts characters who tend to be stereotyped due to social construction.

In his book, Gender Bias in Television Advertising, Widyatama (2007) says that there are three things to think about when looking at gender bias in advertising: the male and female characters in ads, the areas where men and women play different roles in ads, and the relationship between men and women. The following describes these three things:

1. Men and women advertising characters

   Male physical characteristics include muscular, athletic bodies, skill, agility, short hair, absence of cosmetics and jewelry, etc. A woman is characterized as kind, graceful, full of makeup, lovely, has long hair, is not agile, and wears clothes that display curves. The psychological characteristics of men and women can also be categorized as rational or emotive. Men are shown intellectually, while women are portrayed more emotionally. The emotional side, for instance, is readily moved to tears, smiles, becomes angry, prioritizes feelings above logic, and is regarded as being easily affected by her emotions. Men, with their reasoning nature, are deemed more intelligent.

2. The area of men's and women's roles in advertising

   The role area is subdivided into locations and types of operations. Places and types of role activities are frequently classified in the same way, namely as public and private. Advertisements typically depict men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere. Regarding location, the domestic area is the space within and comprising the home environment. The sites include the family room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, laundry and ironing room, veranda, and the house's boundary with the street. Outside of the area is a public space. For instance, places of employment (offices, workshops, schools, salons, picture studios, etc.) and public spaces, such as markets, restaurants, parks, rivers, and roadways. Men earn a living in the public realm. In contrast, women make a living in the domestic sector, serving, cooking, caring for and cleaning the house, cleanliness, clothes care, and caring for and caring for children and spouses.

3. Gender relationships in advertising

   In general, men occupy positions with greater authority than women. Men are shown as authoritative, while women are portrayed as submissive. Men lead while women are taught. Men are in front, while women are in the rear. Men are the recipients of service, while women are the providers. Men are shown as protectors, while women are portrayed as needing protection.

According to the theory above, the writer used the categorization used in the study conducted by Widyatama (2007) to help analyze the gender bias in the advertisements. Each category has different characteristics, as shown in Table 1. The author chose it because the study's depiction of a woman was linked to the gender bias in those advertisements. The three companies seek to offer a realistic image of a woman in ordinary life. The neatly ordered phrases and scenes in the marketing video demonstrate this.

Table 1 Gender Bias against Women in Widyatama (2007)

Category	Characteristics
Characteristics of Women	Physically: wearing makeup, having long hair, wearing clothes that display curves.
	Psychologically: easily to tears, smiles, becomes angry, prioritizes feelings above logic, needs acknowledgment, validation, and praise from others
Area of Women's role	Location: family room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, laundry, and ironing room
	Activity: serving, cooking, shopping for family, caring for and cleaning the house, caring for cleanliness and clothes care, and caring for and caring for children and spouses
Women in Relationship	Women are depicted as parties controlled by men, women as parties led by men, and women as weak creatures, so they need to be protected by a more substantial figure, namely men, and women as male sex objects.

2) Data Interpretation

The data collection and analysis of ShopBack, Pomona, and Fave ads show that these ads contain gender bias. The analysis of this study uses semiotic signs found in these advertisements to identify the presence of gender bias in the video advertisements. The semiotic signs found were visual and verbal. A total of 32 scenes from the three ads, which are only 1 to 2 minutes long, contain elements of gender bias that are unfavorable for women. The results of data collection and analysis of the advertisements mentioned above are detailed in table 2.

Table 2 Result of data interpretation

Category	Variable	Characteristics	Total Scenes
Characteristics of Women	Women are physically beautiful.	Wearing makeup, having long hair, wearing clothes that display curves, and good self-presentation	10
	Women are psychologically emotional.	Easily to tears, becomes angry, prioritizes feelings above logic	
Area of Women's role	Women do domestic work.	Serving, cooking, shopping for family, caring for and cleaning the house, caring for cleanliness and clothes care, and caring for and caring for children and spouses	14
Women in Relationship	Women are subordinated to men.	Controlled by men, led by men, need to be protected by men	8
Total Scenes			32

Regarding female characteristics, two variables are highlighted, namely physically and psychologically. Physically, women are shown their beauty and beauty as outlined in 7 scenes, namely ShopBack (3 Scenes), Pomona (2 scenes), and Fave (2 Scenes). While psychologically, as many as three scenes depict Women as emotional figures in ShopBack advertisements. Ten scenes contain elements of gender bias in terms of female characteristics. In terms of roles, women do domestic work than public work. A total of 14 scenes support this statement, each ShopBack (3 scenes), Pomona (6 Scenes), and Fave (5 scenes). Finally, in terms of the relationship between women and men, eight scenes depict that women are subordinated to men, namely ShopBack (3 scenes), Pomona (2 scenes), and Fave (3 scenes). Overall, 32 scenes were found to contain elements of gender bias in women, namely ShopBack (12 scenes), Pomona (10 scenes), and Fave (10 scenes).

CONCLUSION

This study, entitled Gender Bias in YouTube Ads, intends to examine the correlation between advertising signs and gender bias in cashback application ads. Three advertisements on ShopBack, Pomona, and Fave are the subject of study. The author analyzed the data using Peirce's semiotics theory, namely the triadic model. The author reaches a conclusion based on the outcome of examining the data with Widyatama's categorization of Gender Bias.

It was determined that commercials on YouTube with a gender bias are communications created by marketers and distributed via mass media for the advertisers' desired aims. Gender bias in advertising can be observed in three areas: the depicted character, the role area, and the defined interaction between men and women. Physical characteristics and personality are used to describe the female character. In each of the three adverts, women's physical beauty is emphasized. For Pomona advertising, ladies wear clothing that accentuates their curves, while three ads depict women with makeup and skincare. For psychological characters, women are defined as being more emotionally invested than males. Several tearful sequences in ShopBack advertisements demonstrate this, although males do not display the same emotion. The female role domain also emphasizes the home role. Although there are various scenes depicting activities outside the home, the stereotypes of women continue to be portrayed as they continue to perform domestic tasks such as caring for their children, their husbands, and their shopping. In the advertising, the connection between men and women tends to depict males as rulers, leaders, and protectors. Women are characterized as being dominated, led, and protected by men. This demonstrates that there is still gender bias in society, as evidenced by these advertisements.

These advertisements also contain the second function, namely persuasion. Advertising is used to persuade people to be interested in the message that is being advertised. It consists of emotional attraction, a desire to express product characteristics, and a desire to purchase the product.

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