



Representing the Mother's Role in the YouTube Ad: A Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis of 'Mother's Amazing Hands'

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Abstract In advertising, females are frequently positioned as the center of attention to establish product image through culturally recognized signs and symbols. Advertisements transcend their promotional function, acting as media that both reflect and influence societal perceptions, including gender roles within daily life. This is exemplified in the Vicks VapoRub advertisement titled "Mother's Amazing Hands," which portrays women as mothers perpetually prepared to care for their families. This study investigates the representation of the mother's role within the aforementioned advertisement using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The research aims to twofold: 1) identify the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings embedded within the Vicks VapoRub "Mother's Amazing Hands" ad; and 2) analyze the portrayal of the mother figure through the lens of Barthes' semiotic framework. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing Barthes' semiotic analysis method alongside concepts of social construction of reality, cinematography techniques, and the societal role of mothers. Through the analysis of verbal, non-verbal, audio, and visual elements within the advertisement, the study revealed the multifaceted representation of the mother's role. This includes functions of caregiving, nurturing, and treatment of family members, ultimately portraying the tangible actions a mother takes in providing for her family.

Keywords: Mother's Role, Representation, Roland Barthes' Semiotics, Youtube Ad

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertisements are the outcome of hard work, inspiration, and the product of logical and clear thinking. Advertising strategies are not merely about promoting a product but also about shaping the product's image or value. According to Maburri, the purpose of advertising is to highlight social phenomena that are currently being widely discussed by society as advertising topics and then present them explicitly (Muddafiuddin, 2020:3). Advertising is a means of persuading someone, conveying a message, and standing out from competitors. There are many types of advertising. Television commercials, or TVCs, are designed for television, YouTube, films, and other visual media, while print advertisements feature ads, event notices, and segments. Print ads are more expansive than segmented ads, allowing for larger visual representations such as photographs or illustrations.

Advertising can be considered a crucial medium of communication for conveying messages. To ensure that the intended message is understood, it is essential to have well-crafted content or topics. In advertising, women are often featured as the main characters in scenes or scenarios. The role of women in advertising, in an attempt to shape a product's image, often utilizes signs or language prevalent in society. The decision to involve women in advertising is typically motivated by clear and concrete reasons related to the ad's narrative, which often

references women's daily routines. This advertisement not only promotes Vicks VapoRub but also connects the product to a mother's role in caring for her family and addressing health concerns. In contemporary Indonesia, the prevailing parenting styles employed by mothers are a result of social constructions. Traditionally, a mother's role was confined to domestic duties such as child-rearing, household management, and maintaining cleanliness and aesthetics (Mudafiuddin, 2020).

The public's perception of gender roles is significantly influenced by advertisements, particularly in the context of family (Spasoova, 2021). The Vicks VapoRub ad " Secret of a mother's mighty hands " portrays mothers as protectors of the family's health and well-being. Within this framework, a mother's role is not only seen as a caregiver but also as someone with the resilience and capacity to care for sick family members. Given that mothers are often viewed as the primary pillars in maintaining family harmony and health, this portrayal reflects societal expectations and demands.

Women often serve as a central element in advertising campaigns. Advertisements frequently feature women, and this appeal is typically exploited to boost product sales (Yusop *et al.* 2021). Within the broader media industry, women are consistently relegated to subordinate positions and confined to domestic spaces. In this advertisement, Vicks VapoRub's journey in constructing the image of a capable mother is a key element or symbol used to create the role of an ideal mother. This advertisement goes beyond merely promoting the product or healthcare experience; it also shapes the portrayal of a mother's role within society. The advertisement designs the image of a mother's role, utilizing signs and symbols to convey its message. These symbols and signs are embedded within each scene of the advertisement. Vicks VapoRub positions the role of a mother as central to family care and health solutions.

Previous Research

Research on the representation of women, particularly mothers, in advertising has been the focus of numerous studies. Previous research has explored various aspects of this theme, such as the meanings embedded in advertisements, the influence of advertising on public perception, and the use of symbols and signs within advertising.

Mudafiuddin (2020), in their study, analyzed advertisements themed around Mother's Day and found evidence of "motherism," where the role of mothers is depicted stereotypically as educators, sources of affection, and multi-faceted figures. This study employed Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to uncover the meanings behind the symbols used in the advertisements.

Billah (2022) conducted research on GrabCar advertisements, focusing on the representation of women's empowerment. This research revealed a contradiction between the intended message of empowerment and the prevailing patriarchal social reality. Semiotic analysis was also used to uncover the meanings behind the advertisement.

El Madja (2021) analyzed Mie Lemonilo advertisements and used Charles Morris' semiotic theory to uncover meanings at the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic levels. This study demonstrated how advertisements utilize visual and verbal language to influence consumer perceptions.

This study used semiotic analysis to investigate how such advertisements construct and reinforce myths about the ideal role of a mother and to understand the significance of how mothers are depicted within them.

Research Objectives

Based on the research problem, the objectives of this study are:

- Determine the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in the Vicks VapoRub advertisement version titled 'Mother's Amazing Hand'.
- Analyze the representation of the mother's role in the Vicks VapoRub advertisement version titled 'Mother's Amazing Hand'.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertising Semiotics

Advertising aims to influence consumers in order to encourage them to purchase products or utilize services. Ideally, advertising not only culminates in conversion but also plays a role in brand formation and the sustained maintenance of its visibility at a high level. To achieve this, advertisements should incorporate permanent, readily recognizable markers (for example, slogans, trademarks, semantic emphasis, etc.) (Lytvynenko, A. *et al.* (2022))

Semiotics is a field that investigates signs and symbols, including how they are used to convey meaning in communication. According to Sobur (in Narida, 2019), advertisements utilize two types of symbols: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal signs originate from the language we know, while nonverbal signs stem from the forms and colors depicted in the advertisement. Nonverbal signs do not explicitly mimic real-world forms. However, icons are forms and colors that resemble or are similar to objects, people, or animals in the real world. These icons are employed as symbols.

In advertising, semiotics aids in analyzing how advertisements utilize signs and symbols to influence the audience and convey specific messages. The fundamental principles of semiotics in advertising can be categorized as follows:

- Signs and Meaning: Advertisements must possess clear signs and meanings. Signs typically take the form of images, colors, sounds, and words. Each sign carries a distinct meaning, and this can influence the audience's perception.
- Context: The meaning of a sign is significantly influenced by the context in which it is placed.
- Ideology: Semiotics in advertising serves a function in reflecting society, referring to the values or beliefs prevalent within a society.

Semiotics Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes posits that semiotics aims to translate and interpret signs, both verbal and nonverbal, with a particular focus on nonverbal signs like visual symbols and cultural meanings. Barthes identifies two systems of signification, as outlined by Sobur in (Nasirin & Pithaloka, 2022). While connotation is a hallmark of signs, it requires the reader's participation to function. Barthes delves deeply into what is often referred to as the second-order system of signification, built upon the preceding system. Literature serves as the most evident example of this second-order system, constructed on the foundation of language as the first system. According to Barthes' semiotic model, signs can be interpreted in two stages: seeking significance and denotation, including literal and illustrative meanings. Barthes views denotation as the initial stage in the signification process, where signs provide direct and explicit meanings. However, Barthes' semiotic framework encompasses a second, more crucial stage: connotation.

Myth is a second-order system of meaning where preexisting signs are reinterpreted to convey specific thematic ideas. To appear natural and universally accepted, myths function by stripping away the original denotative meaning of a sign and infusing it with new meaning aligned with the intended ideology. According to Barthes, myth is found at the second level of signification, thus after the formation of a system of signifiers, the sign evolves into a new signifier, which then combines with other signifiers to create a new sign. Consequently, a sign becomes a myth when its connotative meaning transforms into a denotative meaning, and vice versa (Sudarto et al., 2015 in Fahida, 2021).

Various disciplines fall within the scope of semiology, including art, literature, anthropology, mass media, and more. Linguists, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, scriptwriters, and media and communication theorists are among those who employ semiology in their work. Simply put, semiology is the study of signs and meaning in language, music, art, media, and other human endeavors involving representation or replication for an audience or individual (Barthes, 2017).

In the process of signification, connotation opens up a deeper and more complex dimension of meaning. In this sense, signs not only provide visible meanings but also carry symbolic or hidden meanings that can vary depending on the context and individual. In other words, connotation offers a broader dimension of meaning that can be interpreted according to the encompassing cultural context.

According to Hemas in (Puspitorini, 2019), the tasks performed by women are:

- Women as Wives: To ensure genuine affection and tranquility within the home, wives act as both homemakers and companions to their husbands as they were before marriage. To inspire their husbands' efforts, wives must be devoted to their partners.
- Women as Homemakers: As homemakers, mothers are responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of the home and managing the household, arranging everything to improve the family's quality of life. All family members should feel comfortable, safe, peaceful, and in a secure home environment.
- Women as Educators: For their children, mothers serve as the primary educators within the household. Cultivating respect and love for God, society, and parents. A child's growth into a superior and intelligent individual within the family environment is greatly influenced by the mother's role.

According to Sobur in (Surahman, 2019), a mother is the first parent that a child seeks due to attention, expectations, and affection. A mother is also the first person a child knows, and it is the mother who breastfeeds and changes their clothes. With that, it can be said that the figure of a mother is the first figure that a child emulates.

Thus, the role of a mother can be said to include:

- As a loving figure who is able to give attention and appreciation to her family.
- The first figure recognized by her child as the first teacher for her child.
- A figure that her child can emulate.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research investigates the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in advertisements using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. To gather information, ad scenes were watched, and communication experts were interviewed to understand their perspectives on how the role of mothers is portrayed. In this analysis, researchers examined the visual, symbolic, and linguistic elements of the ads and how these elements are combined to produce a more sophisticated message. Academic interviews provide an additional perspective as they can explain the social and cultural contexts that influence how society views mothers (Raddon, A. 2002). In this case, by including external factors that influence meaning creation beyond the ad

content, the research offers a more comprehensive picture of how mothers are portrayed in the media.

4. RESULTS

(Scene: A child's bedroom at night. The dim nightlight illuminates the room. A boy of about 7 years old is coughing in bed. His mother enters the room with a jar of Vicks VapoRub.)

Child: When I... Cough, cough (coughs)... Mom opened the Vicks VapoRub and rubbed it on me. Mother: (While applying Vicks VapoRub to the child's chest) This will definitely make you feel better. Child: Ahhh, it's so warm! (Smiling relievedly) (A moment later, the child looks calmer and starts to yawn. The mother covers him with a blanket lovingly.)

Analysis Narrative: The scene above is a snippet from a Vicks VapoRub advertisement that visually and verbally conveys messages about maternal love and the product's efficacy. This scene can be an interesting unit of analysis using a semiotic approach, particularly in identifying the denotation, connotation, and myth contained within.

No	Shot	Dialog/voice/color	Visual
7	Medium Shot	<p>Sound: A distinctive sound as background music for the storyline which aims to enhance the impression of a child's story. Dialogue: Continuing the child's story: She opened the Vicks VapoRub, then rubbed it on me. Child: Ahh, it's so warm! (indicating improvement)</p> <p>Colors: Yellow and blue, where yellow symbolizes the source of energy, cheerfulness, and happiness, and blue Represents confidence, calmness, and steadiness.</p>	 <p>A mother figure massaging her child's chest and neck area</p>
		Signifier	Signified
		A child who is being assisted by his/her mother as a form of first aid due to a coughing fit.	Demonstrating that the child is being assisted by his/her mother through a chest and neck massage, during which the child exclaims, 'Ahh, it's so warm!'
Denotation			
In this scene, a mother is assisting her child who is coughing and having trouble sleeping by massaging the child's chest and neck area. The dialogue, 'She opened the Vicks VapoRub, then rubbed it on me,' suggests that the mother is using a topical ointment to soothe the child's cough.			

Connotation

This scene highlights the significance of love, comfort, and a mother's role in ensuring her child's well-being. It underscores the strong familial bonds and compassionate care exhibited by the mother as she tends to her child, emphasizing the importance of both physical and emotional support within a family.

Myths contained in this advertisement



The Vicks VapoRub 'Mother's Amazing Hand' commercial has perpetuated the myth that mothers are the primary caregivers within families and possess an innate ability to maintain familial harmony and health. In this myth, mothers are depicted as benevolent figures, healers who not only attend to their family's physical needs during illness but also serve as emotional stabilizers. The phrase 'a mother's capable hands' symbolizes resilience and strength that encompasses not just physical prowess but also warmth, tenderness, and selfless devotion. Mothers are seen as the pillars of their families, always willing to make the greatest sacrifices to care for their spouses, children, and even elderly parents. This myth highlights the indispensable nature of a mother's love and attention within a family unit. For children, who often look up to their mothers as role models, she represents intelligence and skill. Mothers are positioned as vital figures.

The advertisement portrays mothers as guardians of tradition, rescuers in times of crisis, and inspirations for future generations through their seemingly small but profound actions. This portrayal elevates mothers to the status of family 'superheroes,' indispensable figures whose expertise in caregiving, maintaining equilibrium, and providing affection are essential for a family's well-being. This myth positions mothers as the cornerstone of the family unit, responsible for safeguarding the family's health, strength, and love.

The Vicks VapoRub 'Mother's Amazing Hand' advertisement effectively captures the significance of mothers within a broader cultural context. It highlights the pivotal role mothers play within families and underscores the appreciation they deserve for their love and sacrifices. This research demonstrates how the advertisement not only presents a literal depiction of a mother's role but also reinforces societal ideals of motherhood through an analysis of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. The findings also emphasize the importance of understanding how gender representations in advertising influence societal norms. In the context of family health and well-being, this advertisement positions mothers as the central figure, contributing to the formation of social norms about maternal roles. There is a need for greater awareness of how gender is depicted in media and how these messages shape

perceptions of mothers' roles in everyday life (Orgad, 2016). Therefore, advertisers should consider the complexities of women's positions in contemporary society to provide more authentic and diverse representations.

5. DISCUSSIONS

Denotative Meaning In this ad, the mother is depicted as the primary caregiver for sick family members. The ad clearly conveys the value of a mother's role in maintaining family health through narrative and visual imagery. A mother's duty as a healthcare provider is evident in every action she takes, from administering medicine to expressing affection Salsabila, and Angga Wiksana. (2023). These moments provide a clear picture of a mother's function within the family, making her an irreplaceable figure in ensuring family health.

Connotative Meaning This ad portrays mothers as resilient, understanding, and loving individuals. The ad combines history and modernity through body language, facial expressions, and discourse to further emphasize the notion that mothers are the source of genuine love and care. This shows the audience that these actions represent the emotional sacrifices often made by mothers, in addition to physical activities. Therefore, this ad demonstrates a strong emotional bond between a mother and her family members, in addition to making a statement about physical health. According to Barthes, there are two types of signification systems as written by Sobur in (Nasirin & Pithaloka, 2022). Although connotation is a characteristic of a sign, it requires the reader's participation to function. Barthes extensively studied what is often called the second articulation system, which is built on the previous system.

Mythical Meaning The ideal role of a mother as a family hero is mythologized by this ad. Consistent with societal expectations of a mother's selfless and dedicated caregiving duties, the mother is portrayed as a character with extraordinary abilities to care for her family. According to this belief, a mother is someone who is always willing to give her time and effort to ensure the well-being of her loved ones. This ad reinforces the pre-existing notion of women's roles in the home by portraying mothers as strong individuals capable of overcoming various obstacles. This influences how society views the more nuanced reality of a mother's role. According to Barthes, myths are found at the second level of signification, therefore after the system of signifiers-signifieds is formed, the sign will develop into a new signifier, which will then combine with other signifiers to create a new sign. Thus, a sign becomes a myth when its connotative meaning changes into denotative meaning and vice versa. (Sudarto et al., 2015) in (Fahida, 2021: 35).

6. CONCLUSION

This study revealed the multifaceted representation of the mother's role. This includes functions of caregiving, nurturing, and treatment of family members, ultimately portraying the tangible actions a mother takes in providing for her family. Nevertheless, advertisements should depict the roles of fathers and children alongside mothers, rather than solely focusing on mothers as the sole providers of family care. A more realistic and equitable portrayal of healthcare responsibilities can be achieved by including all family members. Highlighting how fathers and children assist mothers can convey the idea that everyone in the family has a role in maintaining family health. To ensure that the messages conveyed are more inclusive and resonate with diverse segments of society, advertisers should also consider the diversity of family representations, including variations in culture, economics, and family structure. This research can serve as a guide for future studies that employ semiotic analysis to examine advertising and inspire further investigation into how media shapes our perceptions of gender roles. It is hoped that this will lead to the creation of more creative works that present diverse and positive gender representations in the future.

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